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HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Photogravure of a portrait from life

THOREAU

HIS HOME, FRIENDS AND BOOKS

BY

ANNIE RUSSELL MARBLE

"*Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.*" WALDEN

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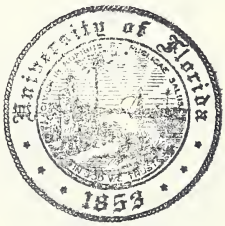

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TO MY HUSBAND

"As I love nature, as I love singing birds, and gleaming stubble, and flowing rivers, and morning and evening, and summer and winter, I love thee, my Friend."

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers.

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(Photographs obtained through the courtesy of Mr. Alfred Hosmer, of Concord.)

A FOREWORD

FORTY years have now passed since the death of Thoreau; his recognition as naturalist and litterateur had gained incipient expression during the last few years of his life and his memory has won cumulative interest with each decade. During the last five years the enthusiastic study of nature, exampled both in schools and home-circles, has extended knowledge of Thoreau's writings and interest in his unique character beyond the special class of readers who represented, for many years, his *clientèle.* As evidence of this widening influence are the frequent sketches and reminiscences that have appeared in journals of varied scope. Since the two American biographies by his friends, Channing and Sanborn, there have been issued two volumes of Thoreau's letters, three volumes of his journal extracts, and sundry minor material which affords new, corrective light upon his character and genius. The biography by the English critic, Mr. Salt, in the Great Writers Series, is more recent and interesting yet it lacks certain important view-points. Mr. Sanborn's latest study of the personality of Thoreau expands or

revises many of the earlier statements and implications but it seems unlikely to reach wide circulation.

Through the kindness of relatives and friends of the Thoreau family, there have been loaned for this volume some letters and diaries hitherto guarded from the public. Interviews have also been granted by a few surviving friends of Henry and Sophia Thoreau, who have now first given utterance to certain anecdotes and impressions. To Professor E. Harlow Russell, the present executor of the Thoreau manuscripts, thanks are especially due for generous encouragement and permission to photograph certain pages of the journals. The aim of this volume has been, not alone to embody the facts, recondite and familiar, in Thoreau's life and environment, but also to estimate his rank and services as naturalist and author, judged by the comparative standards of this new century. In illustrative quotations from Thoreau's own pages, the purpose has been to choose less familiar passages, for a careful study of his writings has discovered many overlooked and self-revelatory sentences. With full recognition of the inadequacy of the result, this study has yet proved a stimulant to research and soul-uplift unequaled in many years of literary work.

Worcester, Massachusetts, January, 1902.

Thoreau's Concord and its Environs

CHAPTER I

THOREAU'S CONCORD AND ITS ENVIRONS

THOREAU and Concord are interdependent words; either suggests its complement. The meadows, cliffs and wooded hills, the interlinked streams, which form the specific landscape of this region, have been stamped by Thoreau's personal, even proprietary, seal. In early recognition of this mystic bond he wrote,—"Almost I believe the Concord would not rise and overflow its banks again, were I not here." If Thoreau's writings are photographs of the town and its contiguous scenery, his name and memory, in turn, are vivified on many a local shrine. The visitor to Concord to-day, even as he leaves the station, is attracted by the sign, "Thoreau Street." The larger hotel preserves a part of the ancestral home of Thoreau's family and until recently, this name has been above its lintel. In Thoreau's journal, mention is made of seven different houses where his family lived at sundry periods, and one is tempted to pause before any residence of suggestive aspect and inquire, "Did Thoreau once

live here?" Some of these family homes have been removed or remodeled but others remain, including his birthplace, moved from its original site, and his last home, near the junction of Thoreau and Main streets.

The pervasive atmosphere of his memory extends through the town, from the willow banks of the Concord river to the woods encircling Walden, with its monumental cairn of world-wide contributions. Near Emerson's house are shade-trees and shrubs planted by Thoreau. He also beautified, with locusts and fruit-trees, the terraced hillside behind Alcott's "Orchard House." On the very summit of Ridge Path in Sleepy Hollow, overlooking the hills and meadows which he revered, is his plain memorial stone. Here, as in the world of letters, his name rests beside Emerson, Alcott, and Hawthorne. While Concord was loved by this trio of authors, it was in no case an exclusive allegiance. All were born elsewhere, all had lived long in other places, and all had visited foreign lands. In contrast with their broader sympathies, as regards *locale*, was the intense, restrictive devotion of Thoreau to the village where he was born, where he spent nearly all his life, and where alone he was able to develop and disclose his true character.

It would be difficult to example elsewhere in literary history such rapt devotion to home-country. Scott at Abbotsford, Ruskin at Brantwood, Irving at Sunnyside, reveal passionate love for chosen landscape but these were residences of later years; to their serenity the authors returned from travels and conflicts amid other scenes. Perhaps, as in other phases of comparison, one is here reminded most often of Wordsworth, yet the peace of Rydal Mount succeeded years of troublous excitement and travel on the continent. Thoreau was an aggressive promulgator of the Emersonian maxim,—"Traveling is a fool's paradise." On return from brief and few excursions into regions not far distant, he was eager to reaffirm the beauties and blessings of Concord. Alcott well said,—"Thoreau thought he lived in the centre of the universe and would annex the rest of the planet to Concord." It was the mission of this poet-lover of nature to select and apotheosize in permanent form the picturesque features of Concord landscape and soil, and to bequeath to later times a rare example of nature's influence as incentive to the purest, loftiest ideals of life and the most varied and poetic concepts in literature. Hawthorne was not unjust to the scenery of Concord and its vicinage when he affirmed the lack of any marked features of beauty

or grandeur, though he recognized that upon these hazy meadows "the heart reposed with secure homeliness" amid more distinct and sublime vistas. The fine villas and velvet terraces, which now adorn the river-slopes, belong to the Concord of to-day, well-nigh a suburb of Boston, and were unknown to the home-town of Hawthorne and Thoreau.

Placidity is the most pervasive quality of the scenery and life of Concord. It offers a restful welcome to the traveler to-day, even as it gave to the sages and poets who became its residents more than sixty years ago. Each visit awakens gratitude that these early literary homes are allowed to escape the fiends of demolition or improvement. The Old Manse retains the quaint duskiness of the days of Dr. Ripley and Hawthorne; one recalls the latter's apt comment that to desecrate the exterior with a coat of new paint would seem "like rouging the venerable cheeks of one's grandmother." The dun, weather-browned, tints of the Orchard House, merging into the sombre hillside, remain an unchanged monument to Alcott's memory and the heroic efforts of his daughter to provide home-comforts for this "pathetic family." The Thoreau-Alcott house is still "the Yellow House," product in part of Thoreau's manual skill, and surrounded

FROM NASHAWTUC HILL

Placidity is the most pervasive quality of the scenery and life of Concord

by pines and maples of his grafting. There are few places where the entrance of the trolley seems more inept, if not sacrilegious, than in Concord. "Margaret Sidney," a loyal daughter of later Concord, has said, with pleasing truth and fancy mingled,—"When all things shall come up for a final adjustment in the last great day of days, it seems that Concord might be gently passed by and allowed, amid general dissolution, to hold herself together untouched. . . . With a not unpleasing indifference to material progress, she adjusts her opinions on every subject, considers this adjustment final, and rests by her river, gentle, sluggish, persistent as herself."

The river, thus fittingly characterized, is the primal element in the landscape. The expanse of meadow and bog is relieved of monotony by the tortuous, interwoven paths of the Assabet and Sudbury rivers, forming, at their juncture, the Concord. Overgrown with grasses, slowly meandering past the town, this river was a source of unfailing delight to Thoreau. Guiding his boat through its tortuous traces, bathing in its waters, skating over its narrow channel, or gathering from its banks and inlets some rare aquatic plants, the Concord river is associated with many happy hours and most poetic pages. He usually chose its Indian name, Musketa-

quid, the grass-grown; he symbolized its gradual ingress and slumber:

> "The river swelleth more and more,
> Like some sweet influence stealing o'er
> The passive town:"
>
> * * * * *
>
> "No ripple shows Musketaquid,
> Her very current e'en is hid,
> As deepest souls do calmest rest,
> When thoughts are swelling in the breast.
> And she that in the summer's drought
> Doth make a ripple and a rout,
> Sleeps from Nawshawtuck to the Cliff,
> Unruffled by a single skiff."
>
> * * * * *
>
> "Methinks 'twas in this school of art
> Venice and Naples learned their part."

Secondary to the river and its rustic bridges, as elements of pictorial beauty, is a circlet of lakes, or more properly, ponds, all familiar to Thoreau's readers,—Bateman's Pond, Flint's Pond, Goose Pond, and White Pond, "the lesser twin of Walden." By the banks of river or pond, the tourist seeks the hibiscus or marsillia, or waits for the appearance of pickerel or bream, whose friendly habits were so familiar to the man who renounced the rôle of angler for that of poet. From the cliffs above the river, Monadnock and Wachusett are outlined in the distance, while in the foreground are many of Thoreau's favorite walks. Frequent are his

journal allusions to the old Carlisle road, the tract of swamp and woodland to the northeast, to the Easterbrook Country, farther west, begirt with birches and cedars and enticing with apple-orchards and berry pastures, and to Nine Acre Corner and Fairhaven southward, affording unsurpassed glories of sunset. The winding highway towards Sudbury and Marlborough has a special charm, for it was his chosen ramble. He once wrote in fanciful analogy,—"the pathway towards heaven lies south or southwest along the old Marlborough Road." In lighter, buoyant tone, in the essay on "Walking," he included the stanzas on this favorite expanse of country:

"When the spring stirs my blood
With the instinct to travel,
I can get enough gravel
On the old Marlborough Road.
Nobody repairs it,
For nobody wears it;"

* * * * *

"If with fancy unfurled
You leave your abode,
You may go round the world
By the Old Marlborough Road."

The pines enclosing Walden, and the Lincoln woods beyond, form picturesque background to the Concord meadows. Sauntering thither from the town, along the red, sandy road, past Laurel Glen

and Brister's Hill, the reader of Thoreau notes the varieties of willows, pines, and maple keys, listens to the notes of veery, bluebird, or pewee, or watches a gay chipmunk in his gallop over the trees. Hickories and pines still form close barricade around the little lake of Walden, though the woods are more sparse than when Thoreau threaded their mazes. Sundry footpaths all verge towards the cairn, witnessing its thousand yearly visitors. A hundred rods away, the modern pavilions of a pleasure park have detracted from the beauty and sacred peace of this nature-shrine.

Such are some of the scenes visited by pilgrims, not because Concord contains rare historical monuments alone, nor yet in memory of her sage and romancer, but because they have been immortalized, "covered with suitable inscriptions," by the hand of Thoreau. As naturalist, he has revealed the hidden secrets of flora, wood-fibre, and bird-life throughout the Concord region with a completeness and poetry unsurpassed. As man, he found pleasure in the free, agrarian life of his birth-town and it is fitting to recall briefly the social and political environment. Concord of to-day is about twice as large in population as the village of Thoreau's records. In active life, however, it is hardly less somnolent than fifty years ago, for it was then the

shire-town and the direct trade-mart for farmers and lumbermen *en route* from New Hampshire to Boston. Through Concord passed stages for Boston, Lowell and Framingham; the four taverns were well patronized in those earlier decades when toddy was a symbol of hospitality not of inebriety. With extremes of heat and cold, lacking the luxuries of modern houses, the people developed that sturdy, self-reliant endurance which characterized the best New England communities. If the sheets froze about their faces on cold nights, as Thoreau related, and a drop of water from the pitcher at once congealed upon the floor, yet they possessed that vigor of body and soul which is fostered by hardihood, not indulgence. Around the wide fireplace, they gathered with zest for leisurely, earnest conversation, when the evening came, a happiness too little known in these later days of over-heated houses and hurried gossip of the hour.

The old-time farms, with their hospitable inmates, the Arcadian homesteads of the Minotts, the Barretts, the Hosmers, formed the nucleus of Thoreau's domestic pictures. During his encampment at Walden, he visited his farmer-friends almost every day or lingered at the few village homes where he was most welcome. With a touch of keen insight, mixed with humor, he describes, in "Walden," the typical

village street, its interests, and its residents: "I observed that the vitals of the village were the grocery, the bar-room, the post-office and the bank; and, as a necessary part of the machinery, they kept a bell, a big gun, and a fire engine at convenient places, and the houses were so arranged as to make the most of mankind, in lanes and fronting one another, so that every traveler had to run the gauntlet, and every man, woman, and child might get a lick at him. Of course, those who were stationed nearest to the head of the line, where they could most see and be seen, and have the first blow at him, paid the highest prices for their places; and the few straggling inhabitants in the outskirts, where long gaps in the line began to occur, and the traveler could get over walls or turn aside into cow-paths, and so escape, paid a very slight ground or window tax. Signs were hung out on all sides to allure him; some to catch him by the appetite as the tavern or victualing cellar; some by the fancy, as the dry-goods store or the jeweler's; and others by the hair, the feet, or the skirts, as the barber, the shoemaker, or the tailor. Besides there was a still more terrible standing invitation to call at every one of these houses, and company expected about these times. For the most part I escaped wonderfully from these dangers, either by proceed-

ing at once boldly and without deliberation to the goal, as is recommended to those who run the gauntlet, or by keeping my thoughts on high things like Orpheus, who, 'loudly singing the praises of the god to his lyre, drowned the voices of the Sirens, and kept out of danger.' Sometimes, I bolted suddenly, and nobody could tell my whereabouts, for I did not stand much about gracefulness, and never hesitated at a gap in a fence. I was even accustomed to make an irruption into some houses, where I was well entertained, and after learning the kernels and the very last sieveful of news, what had subsided, the prospects of war and peace, and whether the world was likely to hold together much longer, I was let out through the rear avenues, and so escaped to the woods again."

To Thoreau's lifelong devotion, as to the present-day visitor, Concord represents far more than a rich botanical region or a serene village of happy farmlands and mild trade. While Thoreau lingered fondly upon the topography, he often recalled the landmarks of Concord history, from that early settlement by Peter Bulkeley in 1635, whose *Concord* with the Indian chief, Tahatawan, is still commemorated by the tablet on the Lowell Road, under "Jethro's Oak." Among Thoreau's "Familiar Letters," edited by Mr. Sanborn, none exceed in interest that written

to his brother in 1837, under guise of "Tahatawan, to his brother sachem, Hopewell of Hopewell." It preserves the dialect and superstitious phrases of Indian epistles, and abounds in deft, droll allusions to both traditions of the primeval settlers and also to current political and social incidents.

In the days of anti-slavery conflict, Thoreau often appealed to his townsmen for a revival of that spirit of resistance to oppression and wrong, which had given to the name of Concord primal rank in the making of independent American history. His own ancestors were buried on the hillside, hard by the powder-house and site of the liberty pole, and close to the graves of Major Buttrick and his heroes of that immemorial April day of 1775. Opposite was the old Unitarian church, where the Provincial Congress had convened in 1774. At the Old North Bridge, where nature seems at her apogée of peaceful beauty, had already been erected the first monument to Concord valor. As her men had enrolled themselves upon the side of right and liberty in the earlier struggle, so again she took preeminent part in behalf of free speech and defiance to any laws which openly or covertly favored slavery. Here centred vital thoughts and acts at the time of John Brown's martyrdom. To Concord, though it was not, as has been averred, a

station on the underground railway, came fugitive slaves, to receive aid from Alcott, Emerson, Sanborn and members of the Thoreau family. Concord welcomed lecturers and reformers of radical type during the crucial years of the mid-century. At the Concord Town-Hall in 1857, John Brown made his famous plea; thence he set forth on his fatal mission; here kind attentions were later given to his family.

Always active alike in movements of reform and of education, the little town possessed a rare mentality and her efforts to increase true culture mark the beginnings of the great revival of social and educational life in New England. The mental lethargy of the first quarter of the nineteenth century had resulted in narrow adherence to fixed tenets and customs in religion and society, with a corresponding self-satisfaction, which often hid real ignorance and was always fatal to creative advance along intellectual and educational lines. The movements towards freedom in thought and religion, exampled in Unitarianism and Transcendentalism, found many earnest disciples in Concord, men and women ever eager to know the truth in its free fulness. Among pioneer towns, she established higher schools, Atheneum and Reading Room, Mutual Improvement Society and the Lyceum,

which brought thither some of the most famous orators of that day when the orator was fast superseding the clergyman as exponent of intellect and politics. During Thoreau's manhood, the anti-slavery sentiment increased, with its digressive themes for bitter dispute, and the Lyceum, here as elsewhere, prohibited for a time all allusions to "religious or political controversy, or other exciting topics upon which the public mind is honestly divided." In Concord, where Emerson was curator of the Lyceum, a long and ultimately victorious battle was waged against these limits to free speech. Among some unpublished letters, granted for use in this volume, is one written by Thoreau's elder sister, Helen, which refers to this matter and gives a vivid picture of Concord's life during these years of political and intellectual revolution.

"CONCORD, *April 27, 1845.*

"DEAR MISS ——:

"I wish to thank you for the nice long letter you sent by Henry in return for my little note, and also to remind you of the meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society at the Tabernacle in New York on the 6th of May. You must not fail to attend and I hope to meet you at the New England Convention.—Aunt Maria has, I suppose, kept you informed of our controversy with the Lyceum, a Hard battle but Victory at last. Next winter we shall have undoubtedly a free Lyceum.

Mr. Emerson says that words cannot express his admiration of Mr. Phillips' lecture. Did you receive the paper containing Henry's article about it? I am glad that you like the Hutchinsons. One of our meetings last May was closed with their Emancipation Song,—the whole audience rising and joining in the last huzza.

"I long to see you in Concord again. We always have something stirring here. Aunt M. will, of course, tell you all the news. Remember me to your brother and sister and believe me ever yours,

"HELEN."

When Emerson, in 1834, came to his ancestral town, to mingle a poet's coveted quiet with delight in intellectual and congenial society, new impetus was given to the freedom and culture already existent in Concord, and a literary fame was added, which the writings of Thoreau, Hawthorne, Alcott, and his daughter were destined to augment. Like nearly all New England towns of sixty years ago, Concord was, in aim, liberal and democratic in social and educational affairs, yet she maintained rigidly certain traditions and exclusions. Emerson's residence, bringing hither poets, philosophers, orators and reformers, of all social grades, acted somewhat as a social leveler and largely eliminated that aristocratic coldness so prevalent elsewhere in New England. Concord retained, and justly, pride in her family names of renown; to her venerable

"Social Circle" only Emerson among her authors was admitted in membership; yet the influences towards free thought and literary expression enabled her to recognize intellect and genius of varied kinds, apart from all exclusive social rank. Inevitably there were occasions when family pride dominated broader impulses but, in the main, this town, which won Thoreau's persistent devotion, represented hardy, and kindly, democracy. Senator George F .Hoar, a member of the family of highest social rank, in recalling the memories of his boyhood in Concord, says: "The people, old and young, constituted one great family. . . . They esteemed each other because of personal character, and not on account of wealth, or holding office."

As a courageous and progressive individual is likely to receive misinterpretation from his inert neighbor, content with the *laissez-faire* principles of society, so a community that takes precedence in reform or education is sure to win envious and dubious comment. An older inhabitant of Concord recalls that, during these years of agitated politics and seething reforms in philosophy and literature, the outside world regarded Concord people "as very queer." Emerson, in his journal, records the mixed pride of the place where visited Everett and Webster, Garrison and Phillips, Bancroft and

Whittier, and where also came "shows and processions, conjurors and bear-gardens, and even Herr Driesbach with cats and snakes."

The atmosphere of Concord during Thoreau's life was stimulative to free, earnest speculation on life and was instinct with simple, noble ideals and purposes. It was fitted to produce men of unusual genius in literature and independence in character, whose words and acts might savor of unconventionality but whose influence fostered purity, reform, and true culture. Much has been written of the famous men who have immortalized Concord but inadequate praise has been given to the coterie of noble, brilliant women of these families of renown. Madam Emerson, with due priority of rank, is best described by her grandson's words,—"a serene and beautiful presence in the household," whose chamber became a sanctuary. Nobly had she triumphed over tragic losses, poverty, and sickness: educating, with rare wisdom, her five boys, she lived to share the home and honor of her most famous son. Mrs. Lidian Emerson added to wonderful beauty of face, mind and soul, the sagacity and helpfulness of the best womanhood. She could bear her part in philosophical discussions and, at the same time, preserve the graciousness of an ideal mother and hostess. Mrs. Alcott, of the famous May family,

had the dramatic, vigorous intellect reflected in her daughter's stories. She was always efficient, sympathetic, brave, through a life that would have crushed or embittered any ordinary woman. Never swerving in practical devotion to her philosopher-husband, with his idealistic fancies which constantly proved futile for family support, she and her daughters must have realized, from years of patient endurance, Louisa Alcott's famous definition of a philosopher,—"a man up in a balloon, with his family and friends holding the ropes which confine him to earth and trying to haul him down."

The spiritual Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, with artistic and poetic tastes, always guarding her husband from a prurient world, exerted a subtle influence upon the Concord circle. Ellen Fuller, wife of the eccentric poet, Channing,—last survivor of this early literary group,—and her more famous sister, Margaret Fuller, contributed to the free intellectuality of the town. Elizabeth Hoar, with a mind of great breadth and beauty, wielded a strong influence for culture and democracy through her own personality and her family name. The wife and daughters of Edmund Hosmer well typified those early families of husbandry in which mental life received marked expansion. Mrs. Cheney, the friend of Daniel Webster, at her beautiful home on

the river-slope, was the hostess of many famous visitors from the political and social ranks. Mrs. Thoreau and her daughters, no less than her sisters and her husband's sisters, had assured places among the Concord women who contributed large measure to the mental prestige of the town. Like other women of this transcendental age and circle, they were often harassed by severe anxieties, for to their prudent, sagacious brains were relegated many problems of domestic economy. "Plain living and high thinking," a spiritual preference to their husbands, became a practical necessity to these women, that they might preserve the health of their children and, at the same time, maintain their own mental poise.

Among these noted and noble women, though somewhat isolated from them, was Miss Mary Emerson, the aunt of the philosopher-poet. She delighted to link herself with the past by recalling that, when she was eight months old, she was held at the window of the Old Manse to watch the Concord fight in the meadow below. Among Concord families, her eccentricity as well as her intellectual vigor, survive in memories. During early life she prepared a white burial shroud and, as the occasion failed to demand its use, she afterwards often wore it upon the street and in the house. Such independ-

ence, mingled with a rigidity that knew not humor, and a severe opinion of changing fashions, may well explain the interview recorded by Mr. Sanborn, between Miss Emerson and Mrs. Thoreau. The latter, even as her life lengthened, was fond of new and becoming dress; on this occasion, she incurred a severe rebuke from Miss Emerson for wearing bonnet ribbons of bright hue, "so unsuitable for a child of God and a person of your years." Miss Emerson, despite personal oddities, due in part to a rigid training and lonely life, was a woman of fine mind. Her nephew acknowledged her lasting influence upon his formative years. Well did he example her favorite maxims often given to him in letters,—"Lift your aims."—"Scorn trifles." In Thoreau, Miss Emerson always took great interest and their intellectual sympathy has been iterated in his journal. In one place, under date, November 13, 1851, he writes,—"Just spent a couple of hours with Miss Mary Emerson; the wittiest and most vivacious woman I know, certainly that woman among my acquaintances whom it is the most profitable to meet, the least frivolous, who will most surely provoke to good conversation. . . . I never talked with any other woman who, I thought, accompanied me so far in describing a poetic experience."

In varied ways the Thoreau family received due quota of stimulus from these conditions and, in turn, contributed to the civic, intellectual and social activity of Concord. Probably no household found greater delight in studying nature, in fostering the educative and sanative effects of outdoor life, when such interests were scantily encouraged. To all movements for reform and betterment, they gave zealous service. While Henry Thoreau, by his peculiar temperament and deep earnestness, was separated from some social phases of Concord life yet a recognition of its opportunities and influence tinctured all his writings. His aspirations for his home-village reached an acme of ideality in the plan, outlined in "Walden," for a university, in a new, broad sense, with Concord as its centre. The scheme was nebulous yet it revealed foresight and strong optimism. Possibly, the plan may have been suggested by the historical fact that twice in the history of Harvard College, during times of danger in the Revolution, the faculty and students had migrated to Concord and there, for several weeks, had left the intellectual and vivacious marks of a college atmosphere. Some of Thoreau's ideas, mystic and iconoclastic then, have been embodied in the aims of modern culture, and have found expression in progressive clubs in scores of American

towns and villages. It may not be superfluous to recall a few of his suggestions in the third chapter of "Walden";—"It is time that we had uncommon schools, that we did not leave off our education when we begin to be men and women. It is time that villages were universities, and their elder inhabitants the fellows of universities, with leisure—if they are indeed so well off—to pursue liberal studies the rest of their lives. Shall the world be confined to one Paris or one Oxford forever? Cannot students be boarded here and get a liberal education under the skies of Concord? If we live in the nineteenth century, why should we not enjoy the advantages which the nineteenth century offers? Why should our lives be in any respect provincial? Let the reports of all the learned societies come to us and we will see if they know anything. New England can hire all the wise men in the world to come and teach her, and board them round the while, and not be provincial at all." Perchance it is not strange that some of Thoreau's contemporaries, failing to recognize in this aspiration an outgrowth of pride and love for Concord and America, which she symbolized to him, resented such bald accusations of provincialism. Such words, however, were needed to incite the educational and literary nascence in America during the last half-century.

No place other than Concord could be so fittingly identified with Thoreau's personality. The varied and prodigal forms of nature allured him to become her poet and naturalist. The independence and virility of intellectual life awakened his speculative mind to search for a new philosophy of living. The literary impulse of the town fostered innate love for letters and encouraged him to preserve thoughts on nature and humanity destined to bring fame to his loved "Rome." Born, bred, and tested amid such environment, his inherited traits, to be noted in the next chapter, reached full development and created a personality unique in American literature. As he immortalized Concord scenery and products, so, in turn, was his strange and plastic genius evolved by her intellectual activity. In an address at the dedication of the Concord Public Library in 1873, Emerson well summarized these varied bonds which identified Thoreau with his parental town. These words, among the later public utterances of Emerson, have escaped the use of Thoreau's biographers. The sentences of possible reproach and disappointment, spoken or written about Thoreau by this first teacher and friend of renown, have been widely quoted and often misconstrued. It is fitting that these later sentences of frank, careful analysis should also be recorded, as testimony to the mutual

pride existent between Thoreau and Concord: "Henry Thoreau we all remember as a man of genius and of marked character, known to our farmers as the most skilful of surveyors, and indeed better acquainted with their forests and meadows and trees than themselves, but more widely known as the writer of some of the best books which have been written in this country and which, I am persuaded, have not yet gathered half their fame. He too, was an excellent reader. No man would have rejoiced more than he in the event of this day."

While Thoreau was concerned for the civic purity and the political and educational freedom and progress of his natal town, which seemed to him the microcosm of the nation, while he was a prophet, preaching the purification and simplification of individual life, such aspirations were sequential from his life-theme, Nature. He found her enshrined in his home-country and he became her seer; here he interpreted her messages and proclaimed her inspiration as motor-power in noblest living. To him no theme could be more free, more exhaustive, more satisfying. The pines with their fragrant aroma and their harmonious soughing, the wayside ferns and flowers, bird-friends and insect neighbors, the season's glorious tints on the hill-slopes and in the valleys, the easeful beauty of river and ponds,—all

these features of Concord have been so magnetized in his unfolding that one realizes he fulfilled his aim,—"Here I have been these forty years learning the language of these fields that I may the better express myself."

The Thoreau Family

CHAPTER II

THE THOREAU FAMILY

THE cumulative fame of Thoreau among critics has been due to his pioneer services as naturalist, his strange literary revelations, and his unique, pervasive philosophy of living; the chief interest of the public, however, has centred about his eccentric personality and the few dramatic events of his brief life. There is no passport more sure to arouse curiosity than non-conformity, or marked courage of thought and action. A man or woman who, defying conventionality, dares to make a law of conduct unto himself, however desirous he may be to avoid publicity and live simply, has already assured himself of passing, if not permanent, attention. This interest may be cheap notoriety, it is too often won by a charlatan rather than a sincere reformer, yet the public easily confuses these two types of men, during the primal stages of revealment. Thoreau, as boy and man, had absolute sincerity and persistence to live his principles, yet from his early manhood until now he has been the victim of misinterpretation, both unconscious and

intentional. He has been called a Cagliostro, a Diogenes, a Simeon Stylites; he has been caricatured as another Yankee Barnum with a show of personal oddities for cheap effect. His occasional acts have been widely exploited, while his basal traits have been ignored. Few men of letters have had so many interpreters and critics; few have suffered so much distortion.

Alcott, who loved Thoreau with gentle trust and who recognized his qualities with keener insight than was his wont, happily united the words, "sylvan and human," in his brief analysis of his friend's nature. Thoreau's traits readily yield themselves to paradox. A primal delight in wild, rank nature was combined with a rare fineness of sense and intellect. A stoical self-control and complacency coexisted with a supersensitive and tender heart towards all forms of life. A keen inventive and manual skill, with much practical sagacity, was directed by a brain which daily speculated upon problems of Attic philosophy and Transcendentalism. He was at the same time conservative and radical, self-reliant and self-depreciative, industrious and leisurely. The development and expression of this complex personality afford many seeming contradictions which, in the end, become consistences.

Some modern psychologists declare that too great emphasis has been laid upon heredity and environment, that each person is architect of his own character to a far greater degree than is commonly granted, and that many evolutions of later traits are wholly distinct from influences of birth or early training. General readers, however, still prefer to retrace personality to the intermixture of racial qualities which have been expanded or suppressed by environment. In a study of Thoreau such method brings ample returns. Many contradictory traits are reflex expressions of complex inheritance. In subtle humor, not unmixed with earnest aspiration, he once suggested that his family name might be derived from "Thorer, the dog-footed," of Scandinavian myth, the strongest man of his age. In tracing the mythical genealogy, he says,—"So it seems that from one branch of the family were descended the kings of England, and from the other, myself." With characteristic accuracy, however, he traced his French and Scotch parental ancestry and the Anglo-Saxon Puritanism inherited from his mother's family.

The grandfather, John Thoreau, was born at St. Heliers on the Isle of Jersey and, when a boy just entering manhood, came to America on a privateer in 1773. In his journal, June 11, 1853, Henry

Thoreau records a family tradition that this grandfather, when *en route* to America, saluted the French frigate, La Terrible, which carried John Adams to France. A tourist contributed to the *Boston Transcript*, five years ago, the story of his search in Jersey for further trace of the Thoreau family and especially "Uncle Peter," who corresponded, for many years, with the American branch. One grandchild of this Jersey wine-merchant still lives at St. Heliers, though her name has been changed by marriage. Her son is a fine scholar, well versed in English and American literature, and proud to claim kinship with Henry Thoreau. The house where John, grandsire, and his brother Peter were born is still standing opposite the churchyard.

On arrival in America the pioneer Thoreau settled in Boston as a merchant. His store was at first on Long wharf and later on King Street, before this monarchical name was changed to State Street. For many years he lived on Prince Street in a house recently destroyed. In 1781, John Thoreau married Jane Burns of mingled Scotch and Quaker blood. While still a young woman she died, leaving four children, John, the father of Henry, and three daughters. The Jersey custom regarding nomenclature was carefully followed by

the Thoreaus; the elder children, John and Jane, bore the names of father and mother respectively. Another inheritance from the Jersey family was the rich, sonorous voice transmitted to Henry Thoreau and his sisters; the former always retained a slight French accent and a bearing of alert, tense energy, "as if he had not a moment to lose." The removal of the earlier Thoreau family from Boston may be traced to the father's second marriage, in 1797, to Rebecca Kettell of Concord. It is certain that at the beginning of the new century, John Thoreau was living in Concord where he died in 1801, at the age of forty-seven. Thus early had the family curse of consumption appeared, destined to shorten the lives of two generations of Thoreaus. There is a tradition that this first John contracted his fatal cold while patrolling Boston streets in a severe rain-storm, when a Catholic riot was imminent in 1801. The last of his children, Miss Maria Thoreau, died in Maine in 1881, and with her the family name vanished from this part of America. She was the family genealogist. In a letter, now first utilized in print, written from Bangor, March 10, 1873, she recounts an interesting item regarding her mother's ancestors and their Quaker traits: "My grandmother's name was Sarah Orreck, American by birth I presume, and

living at Boston at the time of her marriage with a Scotch gentleman of the name of Burns, who came to this country dressed in too furbelow a style to please her Quaker notions, for he had to divest himself of them, (his ruffles over his hands), before gaining her consent to marry him." Henry Thoreau was a worthy descendant of this Quakeress with her rigid hatred of frills and fashions.

John Thoreau, the father of Henry, was born in Boston in 1787. He continued his father's business as merchant in a store in Concord, just southeast of the old court-house. The first merchant had amassed a large property, according to the standards of that time, but his son could not maintain success; perhaps Concord lacked the opportunities of Boston as a trading mart. His business failure was a genuine surrender of property. A friend of the Thoreaus recently told me that, with the honesty which characterized the family, this man, after his reverses, even sold his wedding-ring of gold, that he might yield his slightest effects to his creditors. In 1812 he had married and, at the time of Henry's birth in 1817, the family were living with the maternal grandmother, where John Thoreau was "carrying on the farm." When Henry was eight months old they moved from this farm into the village and the following year his father tested again his for-

BIRTHPLACE OF THOREAU

This farm-house, near Concord, has been reproduced from an early drawing

tunes at Chelmsford where, according to the family day-book, he "kept shop and painted signs." Another venture in trade was in Boston about 1820 for three years; the family lived on Pinkney Street and here Henry began his school-life. John Thoreau seemed unable to recover fortune and he returned to Concord to venture and succeed in another craft. A few years earlier, pencil-making had been introduced here by the Munroe family, to whose large-hearted success the Concord Free Public Library stands as monument. To this business John Thoreau now devoted himself and, with ingenuity and industry, succeeded so well that his sister said he won the first medal at the Salem Mechanics' Fair. A more immediate and practical result was his ability to gain an income. His business was later increased by preparing plumbago for publishing houses in New York and Boston. All the family assisted in both crafts and the exact process of mixing plumbago was carefully concealed from visitants or even chance inmates of the home. Among treasured mementoes of Concord I have a gift-pencil bearing the stamp,—"J. Thoreau & Son, Concord, Mass." The "lead" or plumbago was mined in Acton, a few miles distant, and the coarse grinding was in the mill now at Concord Junction, marked on present-day maps, "Loring's Lead

Works." The fine grinding, by a small weighted machine of interlocked boxes, the rolling and packing, were completed in the upper room in the ell of the Thoreau-Alcott house.

As is often noted in genealogy, the French traits were less pronounced in the first generation of American Thoreaus than in the Concord family. "Aunt Maria," however, boasted "the vivacity of the French," which she seems to have exampled in tongue and pen. A frequent sentence in the letters from Henry's sisters, reads, "Aunt Maria, of course, has written you all the news." John Thoreau, on the other hand, exampled the reticent composure of the Quaker and the sturdy, industrious qualities of his Scotch inheritance, mingled with deft and inventive skill. Punctilious in every detail of life, reserved before strangers yet an interesting companion to friends, he was deeply respected by his townsmen, as was evidenced at his death in 1859. His was not "the plodding, unambitious nature" which has been attributed to him. Unfortunate in mercantile affairs, as was many another during the early years of the last century, he amply redeemed his failure by his ideal honesty and his later persistent and successful manufacture of pencils, plumbago, marbled paper and allied commodities. An unambitious man would not, from a limited income, have

given his four children an education of marked liberality for those days. Among books in the Thoreau library a few bore the father's name on the fly-leaf. They represented the best classics in English. Especially valued by the present owner is a much worn copy of *The Spectator*. A trifling incident interwoven in Henry Thoreau's journal shows the father's deep respect for the studies of his son, long after college days were ended. He gently reproved Henry because "he took time from his studies" to make, rather than buy, maple sugar, though he was assured that the knowledge thus gained was commensurate with "university training."

During John Thoreau's later life his home was resort for noted abolitionists and occasional fugitive slaves. The family name has been closely linked with this politico-reform movement. One who knew the family declared that all were "preeminent and sincere reformers in an era and an atmosphere when reformers were radical by a sort of necessity of environment." Among tributes to the sterling worth and quiet influence of John Thoreau, none surpass Henry's expressions in a letter to his friend, Mr. Ricketson, written just after his father's death, and included by Mr. Sanborn in "Familiar Letters;"—"I am glad to read what you

say about his social nature. I think I may say that he was wholly unpretending, and there was this peculiarity in his aim, that though he had pecuniary difficulties to contend with the greater part of his life, he always studied merely how to make a *good* article, pencil or other (for he practised various arts), and was never satisfied with what he had produced. Nor was he ever in the least disposed to put off a *poor* one for the sake of pecuniary gain, as if he labored for a higher end." How fully the ideality, lofty aim, and unflinching honesty of the famous son may be traced to his own revelation of his father's nature!

In the vivacity and adroitness of mind characteristic of French ancestry, one is tempted to believe that, by some mischance, the Celtic blood belonged to Thoreau's mother. Her active, fluent, and witty tongue, expressive of a brilliant mind, has been accounted as "malicious liveliness." The true character of Mrs. Thoreau, however, has recently received full quota of justice from family friends. Cynthia Dunbar, born at Keene, New Hampshire, in 1787, was the daughter of a clever lawyer. He died the year of her birth and later her mother married Jonas Minott of Concord, hence the "Minott house" where Henry Thoreau was born. Mr. Sanborn, in his biography of Thoreau, has given

a romantic flavor to records of the Dunbar family by recalling the intimate friendship which once existed between Daniel Webster and Mrs. Thoreau's sister, Louisa Dunbar. The latter was a gay, attractive school-teacher at Boscawen when Webster prepared there for college. David Dunbar, for whom Thoreau was named, died soon after his nephew's birth. "Uncle Charles" was a roving, debonnair character, somewhat of a juggler and wrestler and the delight of the children because of his geniality and conjuring tricks. He was a source of amusement and education to Henry Thoreau, as chance allusions evidence; from him, in turn, the poet-naturalist learned some simple necromancy which delighted his many children friends. When lassitude at times threatened him he recalled with humor the proneness of this uncle to "cat-naps" and his ability to "go to sleep shaving himself."

Mrs. Thoreau tempered the gayety and keen wit of the Dunbars with the more delicate, kindly traits of her maternal family, the Joneses of Weston. Perhaps too much emphasis has been laid upon her lively, assertive temper and her agile tongue; a family guest recently admitted that "she was an incessant talker." Her conversation, however, was not limited to gossip or harangue, as has been covertly hinted. Mr. Irving Allen, wri-

ting from personal memories in *The Independent*, July 25, 1895, says;—"Mrs. Thoreau was in many respects a very remarkable woman, the most prolific and I think the most interesting talker I ever met. Her fund of anecdote and reminiscence was amazing and unfailing; her command of the formidable female weapon of sarcastic rejoinder entirely worthy of the object of her special and enthusiastic admiration, Wendell Phillips." Among the letters loaned for this volume is one from Mr. Ricketson to Miss Sophia Thoreau after her mother's death. Among words of honor and friendship are these;—"Your mother was a woman of unusual vivacity, as well as of rare intellectual power; and in her youth, I doubt not, was not only handsome but the life of her companions. I could recognize in her dramatic talent the origin of your brother Henry's fine gift for conversation; and in the quiet manner of your dear father his repose of mind:—combined, the strong contrasts of your parents produced Henry's character, one of the truest and noblest of our times."

In emphasis of Mrs. Thoreau's vivacity and loquacity, one must not fail to record as well her dainty, refined tastes, shown in her home and her gracious attentions to her guests and friends. A Concord lady, who has enjoyed her hospitality, has told me of the fine taste displayed in the arrange-

ment of the plain furniture and the simple, dainty service of her table. With her heirlooms of fine china she maintained many touches of a refined past custom; as example, she always dipped the spoon into hot water before serving sugar, that the fine flavor might be secured. This delight of an artistic nature in food, which should appeal to the eye as well as the taste, was transmitted to her famous son. In a journal extract, published in "Winter," Thoreau refers to his pleasure in popping corn, "a perfect winter flower, uniting anemones and houstonias," and adds,—"It is pleasant to relieve the grossness of kitchen and table by simple beauty of repast to attract the eye of an artist even." Mrs. Thoreau was an ambitious, cheery woman, suffering for years with consumption, yet with undaunted courage. Finally, at the age of eighty-five, even at her death-hour, she is described as "bursting out with a song." A family friend recalls her last, patient days, in an article in *The Outlook*, December 2, 1899: "Ever ready to be interested in passing events, expressing keen opinions or offering valuable suggestions, her hold on life was firm, and it was almost a surprise when she at last yielded to the inevitable and submitted to lie several days in bed before the end came. To a friend who visited her at this period Mrs. Thoreau

recited Cato's soliloquy with perfect composure and contentment. Well might a gifted woman exclaim, 'She looks like a queen,' when death at last had claimed the resolute spirit, and she lay silently receiving her friends for the last time."

Among many records of her kindliness are two extracts from letters in the Life of Father Hecker by Rev. Walter Elliott, published in recent years. Isaac Hecker, the eccentric baker at Brook Farm and later proselyte to Catholicism, as a young man, came to Concord to study the classics with Mr. George Bradford and boarded with the Thoreaus. In letters to his mother in 1844, he describes his pleasant room, its window shaded with sweet honeysuckle and visited by humming-birds. He adds,—"The lady of the house, Mrs. Thoreau, *is a woman.* The only fear I have about her is that she is too much like dear mother—she will take too much care of me." Both Mr. and Mrs. Thoreau were deeply interested in botany and physical geography. With their children and guests they visited the haunts about Concord, collected specimens of plants, rocks, and insects, little realizing that their son was to become America's greatest nature-poet.

Thus the complex inheritance of the four Thoreau children mingled reserve and gayety, dogged and

practical industry with lofty ideals, love of nature and of books, interest in all reform agitations, and delight in refined, domestic life. All the children were keen in mind, strong and individual in character. All sought to attain that "higher end" with which Henry accredits his father. They had an independence and pride, born of conscious power, which never failed to serve the chance need of friend or stranger, but refused to accept flattery or condescension. Mr. Sanborn has said,—"To meet one of the Thoreaus was not the same as to encounter any other person who might happen to cross your path. Life to them was something more than a parade of pretensions, a conflict for ambitions, or an incessant scramble for the objects of desire. They were fond of climbing to the hilltop, and could look with a broader and kindlier vision than most of us on the commotions of the plain and the mists of the valley."

All of the Thoreau children were teachers. Helen, the older sister, five years the senior of Henry, taught for some time at Taunton, and her brother John was a teacher at the same place for a time; later they were both at Roxbury, as Henry's letters indicate. Helen's letters, only a few of which have ever been published but which have been loaned for use in this volume, show an earnest, practical

mind, well versed in all the studies of that day, with an unusual ambition to learn more of the elementary sciences. At her school in Roxbury, her sister, Sophia, assisted for a while. One letter definitely settles this mooted question regarding Helen's private school: "Helen and Sophia have advertised their intention of opening a boarding-school in Roxbury. H. when there, found a suitable room, and a lady willing to board them with some of the scholars. This is a great undertaking with H.'s feeble health; indeed, I don't see how it is possible for her to do it. The terms are very high, and a great deal of course will be expected. Ask E. if Mr. Kent's fifteen dollars a quarter didn't include all branches, excepting music? H.'s is twenty. It was the advice of those whom she consulted on the spot. She herself was disposed to be more moderate." That Helen and Sophia had excellent educations is attested by the few letters written in Latin to them by Henry and included in the volume of Thoreau's "Familiar Letters." The gay humor and loving sympathy gleam through the vernacular. One paragraph is especially affectionate and poetic;—"When Robin Redbreast brings back the springtime, I trust that you will lay your school duties aside, cast off care, and venture to be gay now and then; roaming with me in the woods, or

climbing the Fairhaven Cliffs,—or else, in my boat at Walden, let the water kiss your hand, or gaze at your image in the wave."

Helen Thoreau, who died in 1849, before her brother's genius had met any wide appreciation, was always proud of him and confident of his success. It was Helen who said to Mrs. Brown, the sister of Mrs. Emerson, after a lecture by the "Concord sage,"—"Henry has a thought very like that in his journal." Moreover, she loaned the journal to Mrs. Brown who thus brought it and Thoreau to the attentive interest of Emerson. She was always fearful lest people might misinterpret her brother's frank aims and speech. In a letter to her in October, 1837, just after Henry had finished college, he refers to her defense of his attitude; with characteristic freedom, he urges honest, open expression of opinion, received by society with a justice which will require neither apology nor explanation. Again, Helen is associated with the incident that examples the gay, teasing humor of Mrs. Thoreau, the proud, supersensitive heart of Henry, and the tender, protecting love of the elder sister. Just before college was ended, Thoreau asked his mother what profession he should choose and merrily she replied,—"You may buckle on your knapsack, dear, and seek your fortune in the

world." As the unconscious raillery grieved the home-loving boy, Helen lovingly encircled his shoulder and said,—"No, Henry, you shall not go; you shall stay at home and live with us,"—and so he did, "loving and being loved, serving and being served."

The same tender earnestness which characterized Helen was a marked trait of John, two years the senior of Henry. As one stands before the plain, spotless Thoreau monument at Sleepy Hollow, and notes simply the date—1815, *sans* month or day, on John's birth-record, the strange fact recurs to memory that, in this methodical family, by some droll oversight, no one had preserved with surety this son's birthday. John's thoughtful services to others have been recorded in part. For Emerson he procured a daguerreotype of little Waldo, "the hyacinthine boy," a few months before his death shattered the father's hopes and wrung from his sore heart that pathetic "Threnody." Again, Emerson refers to a little box-house for bluebirds on his barn, placed there by John Thoreau, where for fifteen years the annual visitants gladdened the Emerson household. John and Henry Thoreau were constant companions and the loss of John's broad and warm humanity left marked impress upon the younger brother. With less combative-

ness and reserve, with more cheeriness, John was generally the favorite among boyish comrades. With a good education, though not college-bred, he was a most successful teacher. In a letter from Henry, sent to Roxbury, where he was teaching in 1838, is the proposition, that, after John's school was ended, they should go west to seek a school together, or, find individual positions. The plan for this Western pilgrimage failed, however, and the same year John assisted Henry in a little private school at the old Parkman House, where the Thoreaus then resided. During the next two years, both taught at the Concord Academy, then on Academy Lane, now moved to Middle Street and somewhat changed. This was a private school, for the town had abandoned the Academy for a High School four years before. Research among old Concord newspapers disclosed the following announcements in *The Yeoman's Gazette*, September 7, 1839:

"CONCORD ACADEMY.

The Fall Term will commence on Monday Sept. 23d, and continue twelve weeks.

TERMS.

English branches,	$4.00
Languages included,	$6.00

No pupils will be received for less than one quarter.

JOHN THOREAU, JR., PRECEPTOR."

The following year, September 18, 1840, the above advertisement is repeated with the addendum: "Henry D. Thoreau will continue to assist in the Classical Department."

John taught English and mathematics and seems to have won the enthusiasm and love of his pupils in larger measure than his more gifted, yet more reserved, brother. Extracts from a journal of one of the resident pupils, to be mentioned in the next chapter, record many instances of the cordial, considerate attentions of John to the boys, his cooperation in their tasks and games, and his opportune fig or orange shyly bestowed upon some pupil who was under ban of mild punishment, which meant abstinence from delicacies of food. Like all the family, John was a good musician and the brothers delighted to sing together. One who knew Henry recalls that, after the death of John, he often refused to sing, though love for music remained a master-passion of his life. In "A Week" Thoreau makes definite reference to the gentle influence of John;—"and his cheerful spirit soothed and reassured his brother, for wherever they meet, the Good Genius is sure to prevail." Companions in lofty thoughts and practical home-life, they were, as well, comrades in nature-study and search for Indian relics. In his journals, Henry

recounts their early morning strolls to Fairhaven and elsewhere, while his letters testify to common interest in Indian tradition and archeology. After John's death in 1842, in the poem first written in his journal and later transcribed in a letter to Helen, are pathetic memories of this nature-companionship:

"Dost thou still haunt the brink
Of yonder river's tide?
And may I ever think
That thou art by my side?"

"What bird wilt thou employ
To bring me word of thee?
For it would give them joy,—
'Twould give them liberty,
To serve their former lord
With wing and minstrelsy."

There was a fearful tragedy connected with the death of John, the first rift in the Thoreau household. He died of lockjaw, due to tetanus poison in a cut upon the finger. A friend of Miss Sophia Thoreau, in a recent interview, said that the wound received instant and expert treatment from Boston, but no efforts could avail to avert the terrible sequel. She also verifies the tradition that Henry suffered sympathetically for a time during the hours of agony. His memory of that suffering never lightened; twelve years afterwards, when occasion

necessitated reference to it, he became pale and faint. In the journal poem, already cited, he queried,—

"Is thy brow clear again,
As in thy youthful years?
And was that ugly pain
The summit of thy fears?

"Yet thou wast cheery still;
They could not quench thy fire;
Thou didst abide their will,
And then retire."

Verily the Thoreaus, as a family, knew how to die as bravely as they lived!

Sophia, the youngest of the four children, destined to survive all her family, inherited the practical, mechanical ability and the cheerful spirit, combined with a strong talent for art. To her pen we owe the only authentic sketch of the Walden hut. She was especially fond of flowers and had a fine conservatory near the dining-room. Henry's letters to her testify to their common interest in botany and woodcraft; he recorded, in his journal, their joint pleasure in watching the evolution of a brilliant moth. During his later life they walked and rowed together and when strength for exercise failed Sophia became his companion on long drives and was his faithful scribe. Among some letters, now first published,

is the following from Sophia, revealing her practical industry and her intense love for botany. It was written while she was teaching in Roxbury: "I must give vent to my ecstasies by writing you about the flowers I have found. . . . Since my return to Roxbury I have been very busy, having made myself a gown, worked half a collar like yours, made two visits, been in to Boston six times, besides attending school every day. To proceed to business; on the 19th of April I found the saxifraga; April 22d, I walked with the young ladies and gathered the viola and cinquefoil; April 26th, accompanied by nearly all my scholars I walked over to Dorchester, and much to my surprise found the caltha in blossom, which we did not find in Concord until the third week in May. The last week in April I found the blueberry, buttercup, dandelion and columbine in blossom,—as to the poor little houstonias I haven't glimpsed one this spring." In a postscript she adds that the Pyrus and viola blanda are also in blossom. Surely a woman who uses a postscript for a botanical fact may be pardoned! Like the rest of the family Sophia was fond of music and skilled both in voice and upon the piano, which was a late addition to the pleasures of the Thoreau home. As already hinted, she was the nurse and literary assistant of her

brother during his last years. She lived, moreover, to redeem his character from the unjust representations of ultra-stoicism and an egotistic autocracy. To her true and loving memory are due the later testimonies to her brother's home-tenderness and his friendships. After his death, she continued the family business of preparing plumbago and showed keen, sage ability. Forty years ago it was unusual for a woman to conduct business; with her friends she used to laugh at her inability to establish her name as a business agent. Though she signed her letters with her full name, the replies were invariably addressed, "Dear Sir." Among the interesting reminiscences in the *Outlook* already mentioned, are the tributes to the practical judgment and the artistic and musical gifts of Sophia.

Chance visitors and Concord friends have concurred regarding the tender, deferential, even winsome, relations of the Thoreau family. Their conversation was sentient and witty but always reverential of nobler ideals of life and broad religion. They read the best books and discussed them with fresh, potent insight; they enjoyed games and music; they exchanged visits and tea-gatherings and took part in town-events of social and literary moment. The erroneous theory that the Thoreaus were admitted to Concord society by

suffrance, and not by right, has been fully corrected during recent years. One who well knew the home-circle said,—"No one could more heartily enjoy his family life than Henry." If there has seemed unusual delay in introducing the subject of this biography, it has been with the purpose of carefully revealing the environment, physical and mental, and the family traits of the Thoreaus, in order that, with the background completed, his entrance might seem in general harmony with his surroundings, as indeed it was. If thus regarded, he will not stand forth as the exotic and eccentric that he has so often been called. He was the product of "Concord woods and Concord culture" and he revealed, as well, the ancestral traits of two distinct and remarkable families. French love for nature, wit, and energy, Scotch doggedness and courageous emphasis of freedom, Puritan rigidity of principle and conscience, latent tenderness with external reserve, united with Quaker love of simplicity and dislike of general society,—such family qualities were resident in the boy, born in 1817, at the isolated farmhouse beside the poplars, the peat-bogs, and the ambling brook, on the old Virginia road. The place of Thoreau's birth has been rendered doubly interesting by the recent resurrection of a tradition which is grounded on fact, that here, a

negro, freed and sent northward from Virginia, built his cabin on what was then known as "The Plains." Gradually, a footpath thence was trodden to the town. As the negro was known as "Old Virginia," his narrow, twisted path took the name of "Old Virginia Lane." In memory of Thoreau's active efforts against slavery and his last potent words in behalf of John Brown, the tradition assumes a romantic and prophetic significance.

Biographers always repeat Thoreau's entry in his journal,—"I was baptized in the old meeting-house by Dr. Ripley, when I was three months old and did not cry." Perchance this foretold later stoicism and indifference to the spectacular! He was christened David Henry, and his names were not reversed until college days, although his home-name was always Henry. After the removal of his father's business to Chelmsford and Boston, as already noted, the family returned to Concord when he was six years old. He recalled a dim, childish memory of an adventure with a cow, which, enraged by his flannel gown of red, gave him a violent toss before he was rescued. Mr. Joseph Hosmer, the friend of his boyhood, says that Thoreau disliked street parades and noisy "shows," though interested in the sham-fights on musters and "Cornwallis Days." He preferred to

be a spectator rather than a participant in many of the games; his chief delight was to wander away to the river-banks to search for arrow-heads and pestles, or to watch the occasional Indians who paddled down the Musketaquid. Doubtless, this cautious, minute study of Indian habits gave him that great skill with the paddles which caused Hawthorne's admiration and personal despair. There existed a family memory that, as a little boy, Thoreau was greatly alarmed in thunder-storms and would creep to his father's lap for comfort, that he was to find later beneath Nature's own protection.

As early as ten years his seriousness of mien had given him the common boyish title of "Judge." His wonderful control over a most sensitive emotional nature was early tested. When, as a lad, he took his petted chickens to the innkeeper for sale, he was compelled to see their necks wrung, as he stood by, pale with compressed lips. Channing relates another childish anecdote which is important in later character-analysis. A schoolmate had lost a knife and Henry, accused, maintained quietly, "I did not take it." When the theft was finally located, he explained that he had been away all that day with his father, but his reserve and dogged sense of justice refused to make this ex-

planation earlier. Already his skill with tools had won him a reputation among his mates. He was asked to whittle a bow and arrow for a friend but firmly declined, incurring unjust censure for obstinacy and selfishness. Later the real cause was revealed,—he lacked a knife. This proud reticence, remaining as a trait of manhood, caused those misunderstandings and yearnings for that ideal friendship which could comprehend without explanations, which seemed to him to detract from pure love. As a boy, he found delight in his home and a few companions with whom he was occasionally gay with the *abandon* of a Dunbar. He bore his part in home-duties, driving the cow to pasture, drawing the water from the well, and supplying the logs for the fireplace. His great pleasure was to wade through mud and stream for some cherished flower or brink-side bush, or to join his brother with fishing-line or gun, in those days before the poet had superseded the angler and hunter.

While at school at the local academy, he had part in a program of the Concord Academic Society, urging the negative on the subject, "Is a good memory preferable to a good understanding in order to be a distinguished scholar at school?" In the old Concord newspaper this note is appended to the

report, "the affirmative disputant, through negligence, had prepared nothing for debate, and the negative not much more. Accordingly, no other member speaking, the president decided in the negative. His decision was confirmed by a majority of four." On this boyish occasion, duly reported in mock-heroic style, Thoreau doubtless represented his real opinion regarding education. At the academy, as later at college, he was largely indifferent to the prescribed studies but was always noted for "a good understanding." The Greek and Latin, conned in those earlier days, gave him foundation knowledge of the best classics and supplied many of the quotations, from both familiar and recondite sources so abundant in his writings. Of his college preparation, in typical semi-humor and semi-aggressiveness, he wrote in his class memorials;—"I was fitted, or rather, made unfit for college at Concord Academy and elsewhere, mainly by myself, with the countenance of Phineas Allen, preceptor." In the class-book, found in the library at Harvard University, he again refers jocosely to his poor preparation;—"'One branch more,' to use Mr. Quincy's words, 'and you had been turned by entirely! You have barely got in.' However, 'a man's a man for a' that!' I was in and did not stop to ask how I got there." He did not cast

blame upon his teachers for his lapses but referred to his own roaming habits,—"Those hours that should have been devoted to study have been spent in scouring the woods and exploring the lakes and streams of my native village."

Despite these assertions of negligence, always to be considered as extravagant in self-depreciation, he showed sufficient brain-power so that his family decided to send him through Harvard, though this would involve careful planning of the financial resources. There are hints that this ambition was stronger on the part of his family than as his own desire. As youth and man, he was always best content at home and disliked contact with many strangers. Later, during absence, he wrote his mother, "Methinks, I should be content to sit at the back-door in Concord, under the poplar-tree, henceforth forever." When away from home he pictured in imagination the distinctive occupation and pleasure of each member of the circle, and his affectionate memories gave him many a pang of nostalgia. In turn, amid home-scenes, he was full of practical sympathy. Channing, with authentic force, wrote,—"He was one of those characters who may be called household treasures; always on the spot with skilful eye and hand to raise the best melons in the market, plant the orchard with the

choicest trees, act as extempore mechanic, fond of the pets, the sister's flowers, or sacred Tabby,—kittens being his favorites,—he would play with them by the half-hour."

Such were the qualities of heart and mind, during the formative years of boyhood as well as after the tentative experiences of college, teaching, and Walden life. His life record bespoke a deep, sensitive home-love, a practical helpfulness, a pride and reserve which admitted the *few* rather than the *many* to his friendship, a tenacity of purpose governed by his own interpretation of moral law, an indifference to the more common social excitements but a plain, unswerving delight in nature-study, music, and classic literature, especially poetry. Such were the basal traits which characterized Henry Thoreau when he entered college in 1833, there to meet certain influences which would further evolve his character and enable him to frame a strange, yet consistent, philosophy of life that would bear the final test of personal application.

The Years of Preparation

CHAPTER III

THE YEARS OF PREPARATION

THERE are few subjects of broad interest in America that have shown more radical changes of view-point during the last half-century than those pertaining to the aims and influence of college education. When Thoreau entered Harvard the older conviction prevailed, that college must be a stepping-stone to some one of "the gentlemanly professions." The broader sentiment of to-day, that college is preparation for life in any vocation,—profession, trade, society, philanthropy, statescraft,—was then but an embryonic and feeble vision of a few minds. The college graduate was expected to swell the ranks of clergy, physicians, lawyers, or, when other chances failed, to become a teacher. Analogous to this tenet regarding the purpose of a college education, was a corresponding fixed code of judgment upon a young man's mentality and promise. To gain recommendation by a faculty he must devote himself to the prescribed texts, often winning greater enconium by "a good memory" of some insignificant passage than by "a good under-

standing" of the principle involved. In other words, there was a premium on "the dig." Occasionally, some rare, broad-minded professor recognized the true gifts of a boy who seemed indifferent to the requirements but displayed talent in other directions. To-day, even under the most catholic conception of the meaning of college, as a *life* more than a *course*, with our generous elective system, we fail to reach the latent ability of many a youth whose rank in the old-time requirements may be low but who has genius in other lines, as later life reveals. The president of a prominent college in New England has recently advocated the extension of the educational period that the student, before his course is finished, may be able both "to find himself" and "to make sure of himself." In contrast, however, with Thoreau's college opportunities seventy years ago, the student now has maximum chances to choose widely, to test and qualify his powers along myriad lines and, at least, "to find himself" and his specific interest.

There is much current defense of the smaller colleges on the ground of the closer relationship there between professor and student. Comparisons are also made between Harvard of sixty years ago, with two hundred students closely watched and encouraged by their thirty professors, and Harvard of to-day,

with more than four thousand students and nearly two hundred professors and instructors, where relations must be largely impersonal. Without any discussion of the general argument, it would seem as if the college known to Emerson, Thoreau and Lowell was scarcely noted for this intimate acquaintance or, in fact, for individual insight or foresight. Undoubtedly, Edward Channing, Ticknor, Longfellow, and later, Lowell, as professors, became interested in many students with fine mentality and gave incentive to individual development, yet their examples seem sufficiently rare to be given special reference. Edward Everett Hale, who was graduated from Harvard the year after Thoreau, has given some interesting reminiscences of the class-room atmosphere in "A New England Boyhood" and also in "James Russell Lowell and his Friends." He recalls the favorite and apt term, seminary, usually employed by President Quincy when speaking of the college. In the narrow curriculum, Greek, Latin, and mathematics formed staple products, with "modern language days" three times a week. Of these so-called "voluntaries," a student must choose, at the beginning, German, French, Italian, or Spanish, and maintain his chosen language without change for four terms. As further discouragement to modern "volun-

taries," Dr. Hale avers that the "marks" in these studies counted only half the value of classical "merits." He adds;—"Most of the work of the college was then done in rather dreary recitations, such as you might expect in a somewhat mechanical school for boys to-day." College prayers, compulsory twice a day at early dawn and dusk, regardless of the hours of breakfast and supper, formed another feature repellent to many a student of sincere, but liberal, religion. These became "the sins of omission" which caused the "rustication" of Lowell at Concord and the necessary printing, not reading, of the class poem by the "ostracized poet."

A friend of Thoreau, in granting a recent interview, began her delightful memories by saying,—"Henry Thoreau was fifty years in advance of his times." This is a succinct statement for his whole life and was manifested in his college years. Thoreau was not happy nor appreciated at Cambridge. As his later letters indicate, he deplored the lack of studies connected with his particular interest,—nature in varied scientific forms. There existed a Natural History Society among the students with rooms in the basement of Massachusetts. According to Dr. Hale's memory, the students supplied the furnishings, and he recalls the bargainings with carpenters rather than the scientific speci-

mens displayed. It was too early for the awakening in science in America which really dated from the coming of Agassiz. In research among old Harvard catalogues, where David Henry Thoreau was entered at Room 32, Hollis, I noted lectures on minerology (sic), chemistry and anatomy for the senior year. In an interesting paper in *Harvardiana* for 1835, unsigned as were all of those secretive contributions of students, is a plea, entitled "Manual Labor System," denouncing the suggestion of manual work in college and urging outdoor life and study for exercise and education. The writer says ;—"The pages of nature are ample enough and the lessons to be drawn from thence instructive enough to employ his highest thoughts and afford him endless subjects for study and reflection." Probably Thoreau never wrote for this college journal but the paper evidences the dawning interest in nature with which he was already inspired. His college studies, however, became a subtle, potent factor in his later authorship. Indifferent to the social and convivial life of the college town, he devoted himself to classic literature, reading assiduously at the well-chosen library of fifty thousand volumes. He afterwards frankly said that the library was the only part of his college training which gave him passing pleasure and lasting good.

He became lovingly familiar not alone with Greek and Latin classics but also with the earlier English poets, Chaucer, Gower, Donne, Spenser and Milton. Harvard, during Thoreau's time, was passing through its literary fever. The professors, Ticknor, Bancroft, Sparks, and Channing, recognizing the benefits of literary culture in foreign universities, especially in Germany, brought back to Harvard the germs of a renaissance destined to create the first true American literature. It has been truthfully said that "probably Professor Edward T. Channing trained as many conspicuous authors as all other American instructors put together." Goethe, Carlyle, Tennyson, and Emerson were introduced gradually into literature classes and the students became omnivorous readers, often joining secret societies for the weekly supply of matter thus attainable.

In addition to the literary incentive which Thoreau gained in his Harvard residence, there were sundry minor influences which left traces upon his character. A young man of his temperament, proud, stoical, critical, thoughtful, with a marked independence and lack of affability, however sterling his character, however sensitive his dormant affections, is unlikely to make friends in large numbers among his teachers or classmates.

They recalled his eccentricities rather than his abilities. One college acquaintance remembered that Thoreau always wore a dark green coat, "perhaps because the college authorities required black." Thoreau was in no sense gregarious, he was combative rather than affable in general society, his classmates knew him slightly and awakened, as has many a class before and since, to a tardy realization that they had included a true, though unrecognized, genius. He did form, however, a few strong friendships, while he seems to have cherished a proud, delicately concealed, class sentiment. Charles Stearns Wheeler, from Lincoln, near Concord, was one of the most brilliant scholars of this class of 1837. With him Thoreau became associated in many ways; he was an important influence in the later Walden experience. In the Emerson-Carlyle letters, the former refers to this young student who acted as assistant editor of Carlyle's American editions: "Stearns Wheeler is very faithful in his loving labor and has taken a world of pains with the sweetest smile."

The few scattering references to Thoreau's college life in his letters and journals are interesting and suggestive. In "Walden" he questions the economic side of college with a view to its proportionate results. He probably refers to his own

secluded experience when he says: "The really diligent student in one of the crowded hives of Cambridge college is as solitary as the dervish in the desert." To live economically and yet *live*, not *play* life, seems to him the desideratum for the college student. He would have economy applied to practical life;—"Even the *poor* student studies and is taught only political economy, while that economy of living which is synonymous with philosophy is not even sincerely professed in our colleges. The consequence is, that while he is reading Adam Smith, Ricardo, and Say, he runs his father in debt irretrievably." Thoreau's own expenses, about one hundred and eighty-five dollars according to the catalogue of the time, involved careful retrenchments both from his aunts and his own family circle. He must have been precluded thus from certain social privileges even had his nature allured him thither. He also received a small scholarship.

During the winter months of 1835–6, he taught school at Canton, Massachusetts, and here studied German and imbibed Transcendentalism at the home of Rev. Orestes Brownson of Brook Farm fame. In his interesting study of this community, Mr. Lindsay Swift has emphasized many traits of Brownson. He was a zealous social reformer, radical in all ideas of government, labor and religion;

a man of broad scholarship and an enthusiasm which too often became pugnacity. Reflecting the teachings of Godwin, Owen and Bentham, he was ever exploiting some new "dissatisfaction," a quality which caused him much unpopularity at Brook Farm. He found final rest in Catholicism. In "The Convert" he has doubtless analyzed his own character with conceit, yet truth;—"I was and am, in my natural disposition, frank, truthful, straightforward, and earnest; and, therefore, have had, and I doubt not shall carry to the grave with me, the reputation of being reckless, ultra, a well-meaning man, perhaps an able man, but so fond of paradoxes and extremes, that he cannot be relied on, and is more likely to injure than serve the cause he espouses." Biographers have been content to merely mention Thoreau's residence at the home of Brownson but it deserves more emphasis. While his practical, balanced mind would reject many extravagances of thought and scheme, indulged by the elder man, yet the young college boy must have been influenced by the radical ideas, constantly instilled, and their roots may have been subtly operative in Thoreau's later disquieting and extreme views on politics and church.

The class of 1837 included some gifted men, among them Richard Henry Dana, John Weiss, Henry

Vose, Samuel Treat, Charles Stearns Wheeler, and others. From scattered class records and memorials may be gleaned a few memories of Thoreau by his classmates and one or two personal confessions. Of his yearnings for Concord he wrote in a class-book;—"Immured within the dark but classic walls of a Stoughton or a Hollis, my spirit yearned for the sympathy of my old and almost forgotten friend, Nature." Again, with one of those rare glimpses into his deeply-hidden affections, he wrote, —"Think not that my classmates have no place in my heart,—but that is too sacred a matter even for a class-book." One of the most familiar portraits of Thoreau as a college student has been given by his classmate, John Weiss, the poet-reformer. In an article in *The Christian Examiner* for July, 1865, he recalls the traits of Thoreau,—his fondness for poetry, his outward coldness, his "moist hand-clasp," and the gray-blue eyes always upon the ground, "as his grave Indian stride carried him down to University Hall." Weiss was especially impressed with the complacency which was one of Thoreau's lifelong traits,—"You might as well quarrel with the self-sufficiency of a perfect day in Nature, which makes no effort to conciliate, as with this primitive disposition of his."

During his senior year Thoreau was ill and,

doubtless, "his stubborn independence," mingled somewhat with lassitude, caused failure to maintain his usual rank. Reference to this is in a letter from President Quincy to Emerson, quoted in Mr. Sanborn's life of Thoreau. Despite the complaints of his instructors regarding his indifference, his president reiterates his "respect for and interest in him." There seems scanty reason for the hint that the faculty may have "had other grounds for distrust in Thoreau's case," based merely on a surviving letter from his classmate, Peabody,—a characteristic collegian's account of the excitements of those days, riots in the classrooms of lax or unpopular tutors. Peabody would probably recite such frolics in detail to his sick friend, for they formed his "news," but one can scarcely infer that the recipient of the letter "had a mind too ready towards such things to please the learned faculty of Cambridge." No one familiar with Thoreau's traits as boy or man can reconcile complicity in such pranks with his serious, reserved nature. Mr. Weiss distinctly emphasizes the withdrawal of Thoreau from such college adventures: "Thoreau disappeared while our young absurdity held its orgies, stripping shutters from the lower windows of the buildings, dismantling recitation rooms, greeting tutors and professors with a frenzied and

groundless indignation which we symbolized by kindling the spoils of sacked premises on the steps. It probably occurred to him that fools might rush in where angels were not in the habit of going. We recollect that he declined to accompany several fools of this description, who rushed late, all in a fine condition of contempt, with Corybantic gestures, into morning prayers,—a college exercise which we are confident was never attended by angels."

A letter from another classmate, James Richardson of Dedham, refers cordially to their friendly relations and Thoreau's absence, a natural inference, from "Mr. Quincy's Levees" and the entertainments of the class. In this letter is also reference to Thoreau's "part" in the "performances" of Commencement. Whatever had been his delinquencies, he regained sufficient rank to have place in the Commencement conference. Significant were his utterances upon the theme, "The Commercial Spirit," at this early time in his life before he had felt the influence of his later philosopher-friends. Emphasizing as his key-note "freedom of thought and action," he urged elevation of purpose and spirit: "Let men, true to their natures, cultivate the moral affections, lead manly and independent lives; let them make riches the means and not the

end of existence, and we shall hear no more of the commercial spirit. The sea will not stagnate, the earth will be as green as ever, and the air as pure."

"After college,—what?" was a perplexing question to the young man in Thoreau's time, even as it is to-day. Then the answer was far more restrictive and final. Had financial conditions favored, Thoreau was unfitted for church or medicine. In reading his volumes, one is impressed often by his keen, logical faculty; the suggestion has arisen that his mind, trained and broadened by legal studies, might have achieved brilliant results. His philosophy which opposed existing government and religion, however, had been heralded in college days, and the innate love for poetry and nature, as exclusive enthusiasms, were barriers against concentrated study of law, even if opportunity had offered. Probably Thoreau's name would have been added to that already long list of authors who attempted law to leave it soon for their chosen profession, literature. At that time, however, an author or a naturalist had no sure entrance to public regard nor could he expect any adequate income. Whatever may have been the family ambitions for Thoreau, he seems to have adopted the profession of brother and sisters, and the year after graduation was

seeking a school. Positions did not come and he remained at home to renew his friendships with his loved Concord meadows and woods. He now began his journals. In the first journal, or day-book, are a few laconic items about his life at this time:—"was graduated in 1837; kept town school a fortnight that year; began the big red journal October, 1837; found my first arrow-head, fall of 1837; wrote a lecture (my first) on society, March 14, 1838, and read it before the Lyceum, in the Mason's Hall, April 11, 1838; went to Maine for a school in May, 1838; commenced school in the Parkman House in the summer of that year." ("Familiar Letters," p. 4.)

It was during that fortnight of public school-teaching that the conflict came between his ideas of discipline and those of the school-committee. Again, he declared himself prophet of later ideas on education. It has been asserted that Thoreau's school was visited by a committeeman who discovered that the new teacher did not believe in the ferule as a persuasive and educative medium. Declaring that thus alone could discipline be maintained, the irate visitor demanded that Thoreau should adopt the time-honored custom. Thus reduced to defiant obedience, the teacher feruled several scholars, including the family maid of the

Thoreaus, and then, in disgust, resigned his position. One of the pupils, thus favored, still lives in Concord, near the scene of action, the old brick schoolhouse, now Free Mason's Hall.

There seem to have been two possible opportunities for the graduate, in quite opposite geographical sections, during the spring of 1838. A letter from President Quincy suggested a school in Alexandria, Virginia. Dr. Jarvis, a Louisville physician and friend of the Thoreaus, encouraged both John and Henry to come south for schools and they planned such a trip, as some letters testify. The arrangements did not succeed, however, and the second attempt to find a school in Maine also proved futile. Thoreau did not show entire complacency during this season of vexatious waiting. Is there any greater trial for a youth all eager to test his powers against the world? His friend, Henry Vose, then in New York, wrote,—"You envy my happy situation, and mourn over your fate, which compels you to loiter about Concord and grub among clam-shells." In recompense, however, the letter refers to "other sources of enjoyment, among them the fairer portion of the community in Concord." Henry, like his brother and sisters, had part in the social life of the town during these years, walking, boating, and enjoying

the evenings of games and music. A visitor to the family wrote,—"At present Mr. Thoreau's four children are at home—all very agreeable young people, with whom I have many pleasant walks."

In July, 1838, Henry Thoreau, after frustrated hopes for schools in west and east, opened a little home-school in the Parkman House, which stood in the triangular space now fronting the Public Library. This was then the home of the Thoreau family. His letters to John, included in Mr. Sanborn's collation, evidence the fact that, for a time after the opening of the school, he was content, even gay and happy. "I am in school from eight to twelve in the morning and from two to four in the afternoon. After that I read a little Greek or English, or, for variety, take a stroll in the fields. We have had no such year for berries this long time; the earth is actually blue with them. High blueberries, three kinds of low, thimble, and raspberries constitute my diet at present. (Take notice, —I only diet between meals.) Among my deeds of charity, I may reckon the picking of a cherry-tree for two helpless single ladies who live under the hill; but, in faith, it was robbing Peter to pay Paul,—for while I was exalted in charity towards them, I had no mercy on my own stomach. Be advised, my love for currants continues. . . . I have

four scholars and one more engaged." During the next two years the school flourished, and the two brothers became partners, taking their rooms in the old academy building. Undoubtedly, these teachers introduced many progressive ideas in education. One afternoon each week they took their pupils for a walk to learn nature-facts. On another day careful attention was given to composition and the reading of simple classics, in place of the insipid primers and "recitations" so in vogue at that time. The pupils also shared all lectures of importance on literature, history, phrenology, etc., which came to Concord. A boy pupil wrote in a letter, which has been loaned to me,—"Went to a lecture from Mr. Emerson in the evening. It was on literature. I was not at all interested. He is a tall man with piercing blue eyes." Senator Hoar, who was, for a time, one of Thoreau's pupils, has testified to his popularity among the village children. "The boys were all fond of Henry Thoreau. . . . He was very fond of small boys and used to take them out with him in his boat, and make bows and arrows for them, and take part in their games. He liked also to get a number of the little chaps on a Saturday afternoon and go for a long walk in the woods. . . . We used to call him 'Trainer Thoreau,' because the boys called

the soldiers 'trainers,' and he had a long, measured stride and an erect carriage which made him seem something like a soldier, although he was short and rather ungainly in figure."

For use in this book there has been loaned a journal of a resident pupil at the Thoreau school. The subtle revelations of the home-life, as well as the studies, afford strong group pictures. Especially, the efficient, cheerful services of Mrs. Thoreau for her family and the pupils stand forth in unconscious, vivid outlines. I quote some excerpts which will require no explanation: "Saturday, to Walden and Goose Pond where we heard a tremendous chirping of frogs. It has been disputed whether the noise was caused by the frogs so we were very curious to know what it was. Mr. Thoreau, however, caught three very small frogs, two of them in the very act of chirping. While bringing them home one of them chirped in his hat. He carried them to Mr. Emerson in a tumbler of water. They chirped there also. On Sunday morning we put them into a barrel with some rain-water in it. He threw in some sticks for them to rest on. They sometimes rested on these sticks; sometimes crawled up the side of the barrel. . . . At night we heard the frogs peeping and on Monday morning they were nowhere to be seen. They had probably

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The small sheet of water immortalized by Thoreau

crawled out of some hole in the cover of the barrel and made for the river, as Mrs. Thoreau affirmed that when she heard them in the night their voices seemed to recede in that direction." In the same exact and thoughtful tone are records of trips for wild flowers, sweetbriars, or pine knots, practical lessons in anatomy, and ornithology, and share in the cultivation of the garden. The pupils had social pleasures, as well as studies and excursions for specimens. Tea-parties and picnics are mentioned. One interesting entry reads;—"After school Mrs. T., Aunt, Mr. H. T. and I went to Mr. Alcott's. His little girl comes to our school. I had the honor of carrying some yeast in a bottle for Mrs. Alcott." There is careful recital of the food, in true schoolboy style, including a feast of clams in the pupil's room, in which John participated. Very naïve is the record of "April 2d. Is Fast Day. We had very inappropriately the best breakfast we have had since I came here, consisting of flapjacks. I went to meeting all day and to an antislavery lecture by Mr. Woodbury in the evening."

In a letter from this same pupil is reference to the boat built by the Thoreau brothers, made famous by "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers." This brief vacation, eagerly planned, was

in the late summer of 1839. With the boat built by their own manual skill, and with supplies from their own garden, they were independent and blithe in mood. In "A Week" are sundry allusions to the Concord friends to whom they did not wave farewells,—a characteristic touch of non-conformity. They sounded their gun, however, as a final salute when they had passed from sight. The survey of the late meadow-flowers, polygonum, Gerardia, neotia, ends with a somewhat expanded comment on the "large and conspicuous flowers of the hibiscus, covering the dwarf willows and mingled with the leaves of the grape, and we wished that we could inform one of our friends behind of the locality of this somewhat rare and inaccessible flower before it was too late to pluck it." They did find a messenger and the beautiful, brilliant *hibiscus moscheutos* came to this friend, Miss Prudence Ward, who, with her mother, visited for many years in Concord, ever welcome guests and friends of Thoreau's aunts and mother. Mrs. Ward was the widow of Colonel Joseph Ward of Revolutionary fame, and to the letters of this mother and daughter this volume is largely indebted for much new material on the home-life of the Thoreau family. The granddaughters of Mrs. Ward now live in Spencer, Massachusetts, in a rare treasure-

house of historical and literary mementoes. Miss Ward, like the Thoreau family, delighted in botany; she was also an artist of true, innate ability. Among some of her sketches which have been preserved is a fine study in color of this very hibiscus, with its vivid roseate hue. In a letter written during September, 1839, she refers to this excursion of the brothers. In the same letter are these significant sentences;—"I suppose C. told you of the very pleasant visit we had from Ellen. We have also heard from there directly by J. T. J. enjoyed himself very well with Ellen and the boys."

Ingenuous and natural as are these references they illumine a very important incident in the life of Henry Thoreau. There has ever lingered a romantic haze about this period of his manhood; perhaps one may regret that the probing public of to-day has divulged and exposed his heart-secret. The extract from the letter above quoted emphasized the family opinion that John was devoted to this young girl, whose family was closely related to the Thoreaus by ties of friendship, and that Henry's sentiment, if such existed, was completely hidden. Among the detached items in the pupil's journal, already mentioned, is a subtle, intuitive entry,—his discovery of Ellen's initials cut on the red bridge, "between Mr. J. and Mr. H. Thoreau,

which bore dates 1830 and 1835." As suggestive, also, is the next boyish sentence,—"Mr. Henry's initials were cut very neatly and deep." Henry's undoubted love for this young girl was noble in its purity and renunciation and it has tinted with its ideal light all his later heart-life, and given rare spirituality to his words upon love and marriage. Mr. Burroughs shows scanty insight into a deep, silent nature like Thoreau's when he says of this self-abnegation,—"It doubtless cost him less effort than the same act would have cost his more human brother." I have seen a photograph of this woman, loved so tenderly by both John and Henry; in later life, the face had retained matchless beauty and serenity. Sophia's letters to her, too sacred to print, witness her affectionate interest in the entire family as long as any member survived. She married a clergyman and lived a happy, quiet life of service to her large family and her parish. She has recently died at a ripe, revered age. May the world be content to hallow the memory and respect the silence of this noble woman!

Emerson once stated that Thoreau's poem, "Sympathy," which appeared in *The Dial* in 1840, had reference to this loved one under guise of

> "a gentle boy
> Whose features all were cast in virtue's mould."

Doubtless the supposition arose from the sentiment of the ninth stanza,—

> "Eternity may not the chance repeat;
> But I must tread my single way alone,
> In sad remembrance that we once did meet,
> And know that bliss irrevocably gone."

While his romance may have suggested this thought, the explanation of the subject of the poem seems strained and unlikely. Thoreau hated subterfuge in any form and his love-poems were concealed at this time, not printed, in full accord with his temperament. His family, on the contrary, have explained that "the gentle boy" was the brother of Ellen, a lad of eleven years, with refined, noble character, later a resident pupil at the Thoreau school. Henry was deeply interested in the boy but failed to win the cordial friendship given to the less reserved, and more sunny, John. The poem was written after the boy had visited the Thoreau family. His brother George was somewhat envious of the honor paid to his elder companion, so he begged Thoreau to write and dedicate a poem to him. The light, doggerel verses in answer have not appeared in print, save in an English magazine; —the bluebirds that give motive to the stanzas had become identified with the Thoreau home and are referred to in many letters. In any criticism upon

these simple verses one must recall that they were designed for a boy of seven years, and belong to the juvenile literature, at that time scanty and prim.

"In the midst of the poplar that stands by our door
We planted a bluebird's box,
And we hoped before the summer was o'er,
A transient pair to coax.

"One warm summer day the bluebirds came,
And lighted on our tree;
But at first the wanderers were not so tame,
But they were afraid of me.

"They seemed to come from the distant south
Just over the Walden Wood,
And skimmed along with open mouth,
Close by where the bellows stood.

* * * * * *

"Methinks I had never seen them before,
Nor indeed had they seen me;
Till I chanced to stand by our back-door,
And they came to the poplar-tree."

Mingled with the reserve of Thoreau was ever a strong, basal affection and the sentiments of a poet. At this time, when he was twenty-three years old, the heart-sentiment was near the surface and required only cultivation, rather than repression, to cause quite a different development of his entire nature. The years from 1839 to 1842 are very im-

portant in the evolution of his emotional and philosophical traits. They were the happiest years of active, buoyant life, they brought him his deepest sentiments and his keenest griefs, and they also gave him direct contact with his most influential friends. His emotional nature seems to have suffered "arrested development" after the experiences of these years. Circumstances, in rapid succession, interfered with the expansion of his happy emotions; other incidents of environment caused a resort to nature and philosophy to aid in the repression and endurance of disappointment; his new-made friends fostered the extreme ideals of transcendental thought on the abstract problems rather than the amenities of life.

Before turning to those later influences, which prepared for his climactic experience at Walden, attention is called to one poem which recorded the memory of his love and suggested the possibilities of gentleness and expansive emotions which a happy issue might have brought into his later life. In the second section of "A Week" the "elastic and crystalline air" brings a reminiscence, followed by the poem generally entitled in collections, "To the Maiden in the East." It has been claimed that the poem was addressed to his friend, Mary Russell, afterwards Mrs. Marston Watson, of Plymouth.

Without disputing this personal dedication, one must recognize in the lines a sentiment deeper than friendship. It radiates the romantic fervor of Thoreau during those years when his love awakened and then became submerged. The imagery and melody are preeminent:

"It was a summer eve,
The air did gently heave
While yet a low-hung cloud
Thy eastern skies did shroud;
The lightning's silent gleam,
Startling my drowsy dream,
Seemed like the flash
Under thy dark eyelash.

"Still will I strive to be
As if thou wert with me,
Whatever path I take,
It shall be for thy sake,
Of gentle slope and wide,
As thou wert by my side,
I'll walk with gentle pace,
And choose the smoothest place,
And careful dip the oar,
And shun the winding shore,
And gently steer my boat
Where water-lilies float,
And cardinal-flowers
Stand in their sylvan bowers."

In the extracts from Thoreau's journal, during these years from 1839–1841, are a few subtle references to his disappointments and his manly courage. January 20, 1841, he wrote,—"Disappoint-

ments make us conversant with the nobler part of our nature. It will chasten us and prepare us to meet accident on higher ground next time."

As mentioned in the review of John's life, the two brothers enlarged their classes and taught in the Concord Academy from 1839–1841. Though this was a very brief period of the tentative years of Henry Thoreau's life, and it represented all of his direct school-teaching, yet, in a broad sense, his entire influence, widely and subtly extended, was that of a teacher and the trend of his mind was assertive and pedagogical, though rarely pedantic. His aim throughout life was to teach the value and messages of Nature, in her full meaning. The long walks, in which he delighted to include the children of the village no less than of his school, were really matchless lessons in nature-observation. To each individual child he would give some special attention or rouse some specific enthusiasm in flower or habits of bird and insect. Not alone in personal experiment, as a means of teaching, but also in the use of the story, as the most potent educative method, Thoreau was a prophet and example to these later decades. With the insight of a modern pedagogue he realized the need of training the imagination, so largely starved during the first century of American school-life.

The children of the Emerson household, and others within his environment, have recalled the marvelous skill with which he would narrate stories from mythology, history and classic poems, or would feed their knowledge and fancy alike by recital of Indian legends and customs. With the true instinct of a teacher he found exhaustless pleasure and profit, throughout life, in the comradeship of young minds, even when their wisest elders offered counter-attractions. Mr. Albee, in his recent "Remembrances of Emerson," recalls the memorable day spent at the Emerson home where Thoreau was an inmate and where he devoted himself during the entire evening to the children and corn-popping.

When Thoreau abandoned teaching in 1841 he accepted an invitation to become one of the Emerson household; he was there from April, 1841 to May, 1843 and again for a year, during the absence of Emerson in England in 1847–8. This arrangement, often misinterpreted, in each case, seems to have been at Mr. Emerson's request, though its benefits to Thoreau were evident. A Concord friend of both families, in recent allusion to the subject, said,— "It was a favor on Thoreau's part to go to Mr. Emerson's home and remain with his family." The relations between the men had become friendly, al-

most intimate. Emerson found the younger man an inspiration to nature-study and also a practical adviser and assistant. To Carlyle he had already written of this young poet "full of melodies and inventions." Again, he paid him full tribute,—"And he is thus far a great benefactor and physician to me, for he is an indefatigable and skilful laborer." He attended to the business affairs of the household, he supervised and planted the gardens and waste lands, and acted for his host in many matters connected with the editorship of *The Dial.* All readers of Emerson's journal recall his frank confessions of dismay at tasks of husbandry. Little Waldo's famous comment,—"Papa, I am afraid you will dig your leg," is sufficient commentary upon his lack of skill with garden tools. He enjoyed walks which "cleared and expanded the brain," but he revolted from the patient, slow "stoopings and scrapings and fingerings" which left him "peevish and poor-spirited." In contrast was the light-hearted skill of Thoreau as a gardener.

Further discussion of Thoreau's friendship with the members of the Emerson home will be reserved for the chapter upon his friends but one must note the formative influences of these years of residence as house-inmate in one of the most intellectual and

stimulative homes in America. Here he studied and wrote, some of his poems and studies finding a receptacle in *The Dial*. He also gave occasional lectures and had part in the Alcott Conferences. In a letter to her husband, Mrs. Emerson mentions one of the Conversations where, in argument, "Henry was brave and noble; well as I have always liked him, he still grows on me." Thus, with opportunities for manual exercise among the trees, vines, and flowers that he loved, and with the mental expansion furnished by acquaintance with the poets and philosophers who came to the Emerson home, Thoreau was happy and appreciated. The interchange of services was entirely reciprocal. Dr. Edward Emerson has declared that "the presence of such a friendly and sturdy inmate as Thoreau was a great comfort." In the letters of Thoreau to Emerson are many warm and graceful acknowledgments of their kindness, "a gift as free as the sun or the summer, though I have somewhat molested you with my mean acceptance of it."

A double grief, however, came to Thoreau and Emerson during the winter of 1842,—an experience which brought at first stultifying despond and later calm acquiescence to Thoreau's soul. In a letter to Mrs. Brown, the sister of Mrs. Emerson, in March, 1842, he refers to these joint events of sadness, the

deaths of John Thoreau and Waldo Emerson. With tender memory of his brother, he recounts the strange calm brought to him as he listened to a music-box soon after John's death, and recalls the steadfast rotation of the seasons, the songs of the birds and the gentle flow of the river, until he can write with peaceful philosophy, "the everlasting serenity will appear in this face of God, and we will not be sorrowful if it is not." The letter shows a deep, controlled grief and a groping, yet undaunted, faith suggestive of passages of "In Memoriam." With delicate beauty he says of the death of little Waldo,—"He died as the mist rises from the brook, which the sun will soon dart his ray through. Do not the flowers die every autumn? He had not taken root here." ("Familiar Letters," p. 48.)

Thoreau's ambitions for a future life of authorship, with the necessary leisure to develop and express his thought, had shown early in life and had been fostered by his service on *The Dial*. An opportunity offered in 1843 for him to tutor the son of Mr. William Emerson, at Castleton, Staten Island. As this arrangement would introduce him to New York litterateurs and editors, he took the position and remained there about six months. His letters record his cordial relations with all the Emerson family but the change did not prove

beneficial. Hawthorne mentions in his note-books that one reason for Thoreau's removal to New York was poor health. His last illness had several premonitory symptoms in attacks of bronchitis during these earlier years. In letters, he mentions, briefly as ever, "his tenacious sickness," colds, lethargy, bronchitis. He formed a friendship with Horace Greeley, destined to be of much practical aid later; he also saw and admired the elder Henry James and his stalwart, sincere manhood. It was evident that New York men who met Thoreau regarded him as a representative of the Transcendentalists, in truth, as one of their expert logicians. He had published "Walk to Wachusett" in the *Boston Miscellany* and a few other articles for which, he wrote, he "was awaiting a shower of shillings." He must have met many discouragements as well as kindnesses from New York publishers in these earlier decades of American literature. He decides, "on the whole, however, it is a very valuable experience." With a droll survey of the few magazines and their contributions "which cost nothing and are worth no more," he adds,—"they say there is a Lady's Companion that pays,—but I could not write anything companionable." He enjoyed the libraries, he studied the crowds, he frequented the shore and interviewed the seamen. It was under this environment that

he wrote "The Fisher's Boy," with strong self-revelation and vivid picture, one of the poems deemed worthy, by Mr. Stedman, of a place in his American Anthology:

"My life is like a stroll upon the beach,
As near the ocean's edge as I can go;
My tardy steps its waves sometimes o'er reach,
Sometimes I stay to let them overflow.

* * * * * * *

"I have but few companions on the shore,
They scorn the strand who sail upon the sea;
Yet oft I think the ocean they've sailed o'er
Is deeper known upon the strand to me.

"The middle sea contains no crimson dulse,
Its deeper waves cast up no pearls to view;
Along the shore my hand is on the pulse,
And I converse with many a shipwrecked crew."

There are good reasons to believe, from letters sent to Thoreau, that Emerson and Channing, perhaps other friends, expected he would gain some literary work in New York and remain there several years. Perhaps his impatient attitude towards nebulous chances in authorship proved one of the first disappointments to Emerson. Thoreau surely lost faith in future success in New York and returned to Concord in the autumn of 1843. He reiterates in his letters his constant outlook for schools for himself and Helen. None were found

and the day-book tells the simple story of the next year,—"Made pencils in 1844; Texas house to August 29, 1850." These two references show that the poet-naturalist spent the year before his Walden experiment in mechanical work, or, as he loved to express the thought, became "Apollo serving Admetus." Especially did his soul revolt at the portion of the story told by Euripides where the lofty-minded Phœbus is condemned to drudge for the selfish, sordid Admetus. It must not be inferred that Thoreau scorned manual work, rather was it a part of his creed, but he yearned for the leisure to develop also the higher faculties; he too had

"The mind of man and all that's made to soar!"

Always skilful and exact in crafts, it is narrated that he once gained a certificate for making the best pencil then produced. He declared that he would make no more, since he had reached perfection, though probably he desisted because he attained to higher ideals for his life. It is significant, however, that he did return to the trade later, whenever the family needs required.

The second entry for this year suggests another fact of interest. "The Texas house," to which the family moved, was built almost entirely by father

and son. The name is somewhat mystical; an explanation was recently given to me by an old Concord resident. There was a large white star, near the station, and, as this was the time of agitation over the admission of Texas, "the lone star state," a colloquialism arose giving the name of Texas to that part of the town beyond the significant star.

To this point the life-history of Thoreau seems composed of trivial yet tentative experiences, not unlike those of many young men whose temperament and vicissitudes bring a series of disappointing trials. Conscious of this, he had confronted the query, Should his life become a failure because he could not adapt it to circumstances or, on the other hand, should he create and compel circumstances to satisfy his needs, physical, mental and spiritual? He seemed to face two irreconcilable necessities,—a sufficient income for his physical wants on the one side, and a no less urgent demand for leisure to study and write, to satisfy the intellectual and poetic cravings. Confronting this dilemma, he decided to put to the test one phase of his transcendental philosophy, the simplification of life,—an ideal constantly urged in his earlier letters. The result was the unique development gained from the next two years in the Walden woods.

The Walden Experiment

CHAPTER IV

THE WALDEN EXPERIMENT

THE methods of modern scholars happily blend induction and deduction. With analysis keen and delicate, which current science applies to all phases of life, there is joined the careful synthesis of these component elements before the ultimatum of criticism is reached. In past history and biography, there was a proneness to overrate certain prominent facts in character-analysis and overlook more integral but less obvious features. Modern historians coalesce the major and minor life-expressions of an individual or a period. The result of this later method in biography has been especially corrective. Greater use had been made of autobiographic journals and letters, revealing the entire man, less has depended upon partial and prejudiced conjectures.

Until very recent years it has been the honest opinion of the general world of readers that Thoreau was a stoic and a hermit. Critics have sacrificed justice to cleverness, they have delighted to picture him as an American Diogenes, sitting in his

tub of Walden sunlight and roused, if at all, to warn all outsiders away from the rays of his special possession, Nature. The much-exploited incident of his Walden life, which we shall regard as an experiment, as he called it, represented only two years and a half of his forty-five years. It has been so overemphasized that "the hermit of Walden" has become his world-wide sobriquet; to many, as to Dr. Japp, Thoreau seemed "an odd, unaccountable kind of person." No one would assert that the motives of critics and biographers have been due, in the main, to intentional injustice to Thoreau; rather has there been a desire to picture, in the most dramatic light, one of the most unique and romantic episodes of modern literary history. A mystical charm always encircles the lives of hermits and ascetics, from John the Baptist and the early Essenes to Tristram and Roger Crab. A far greater curiosity has centred about this young recluse of modern life, who came from and returned to a happy home, who preached no religious creed or social scheme but who found in his life at Walden nucleus for a volume of bright, charming studies of nature, society, morality, and his relation to all three factors. The close student of Thoreau's life and records, coupled with the testimony of friends who visited him at Walden, must

recognize that this experiment was a natural result of his environment and his complex nature. Thus regarded, the episode loses much of that *outré* look which, according to some critics, explains the real interest in his life.

The intellectual revolution in New England, succeeding the movements of progress in politics and literature in Europe during the early decades of the nineteenth century, had two sequential forms, Unitarianism and Transcendentalism. Distinct as was each in direct aim and result, they were allied with that great world-movement of liberty which transformed all the broader aspects of life. Channing preached a new, fearless gospel of mental freedom in religion, an appeal to reason and individual conscience rather than formulas. Transcendentalism, with relevant changes from the doctrines of Kant, Coleridge and Carlyle, sought to gain freedom for intellect,—to discover verities by reason and intuition, not by dogmas. As Unitarianism became dogmatic at times and suffered from divergent and extreme teachings tending towards agnosticism, so Transcendentalism, still more susceptible to emotional excess, often submerged its simpler, nobler ideals beneath much extravagance and mysticism. In the application of idealism to moral conduct and in the emphasis of the unity of

life and literature, Transcendentalism, despite some chiaroscuric phases, became for many years one of the strongest influences upon American character and letters.

One of the most vital and practical effects of Transcendental teaching was the wish to devise means to simplify life, both economically and socially. To so reduce the daily wants of individual and family that time and anxiety might be saved and greater opportunities given for education of the higher facilities, "the things of the intellect and soul,"—this represented the open and latent purpose of leaders of this thought-movement. Joined with this practical desire to lessen physical demands and financial strain, was the fontal norm in the primal philosophy from which this had been evolved, —"the return to nature," to her sanative influence in lieu of artificiality and luxury. Mr. Emerson, in that rhapsodic essay on "Nature," well characterized by Carlyle as "azure-colored," had emphasized the purifying and educative effects of nature on the senses, intellect, morals and will. He always questioned, however, the utility of communal schemes for simplification and social reform. In 1840, he wrote to Carlyle,—"We are all a little wild with numberless projects of social reform; not a reading-man but has a draft of a new community in his

waistcoat pocket." At about the same time his sagacity and prudence warned these Sequesters;—"It is a sign of our times, conspicuous to the coarsest observer, that many intelligent and religious persons withdraw themselves from the common labors of and competitions of the market and caucus, and betake themselves to a solitary and critical way of living, from which no solid fruit has yet appeared to justify their separation." Reformers and individual oddities abounded and were attracted to Emerson's home in great variety. Vegetarians, spiritualists, mystics, philosophers of all degrees of earnestness and charlatanism came thither, to meet Thoreau and the other friends of Emerson, to leave behind often, as the lasting impress, the lack of that quality so well defined by Emerson as "the saving grace of common sense."

Many critics of the proposed communities, among them Dr. Ezra Ripley and Mr. Emerson, failed to understand the ultimate aim of the promoters,—not exclusion but inclusion. If these sundry settlements should prove stable, they were to furnish models, like Ruskin's "St. George's Guild," for establishment in all parts of America of agrarian communities, presided over by men of intellect and philosophical training. These experiments, so numerous in America from 1840 to 1850, had two

general forms,—the larger number were communities for families, the smaller in number and lesser known were individualistic. Of the latter, Thoreau's experiment is the popular example. The wave of social agitation which overran America at this time was the natural sequence of the teachings of Lassalle and Fourier, of Southey, Coleridge and Godwin. The actual experiments of Robert Owen, on his proselyting visit from England twenty years before, had included a short-lived settlement in Indiana. The Fourierian Phalansteries in New Jersey and Pennsylvania were established under the guidance of William Channing and Horace Greeley. At about the same time was started the still existent Oneida Community.

As early as 1835 there had gathered in New England, with centre of interest at Boston, philosophers to discuss the idealism of Kant, Hegel and Schelling and its interpretations in the writings of English authors. To these abstract phases of discussion were joined, in America, zealous arguments on state, church and society. Here smouldered reactionary fires against both the Trinitarian and the Unitarian forms of Puritanism. Defiant to the Calvinistic dogma of man's inherited depravity, were doctrines of human goodness and progress, emphasis of the divinity in man and his relation to

the intuitive, transcendent life. When these "disciples of the newness" met in Boston for the symposium, compared by Emerson to "going to heaven in a swing," the public gave them the name of "The Transcendental Club," though it is still questioned if any real organization existed. James Freeman Clarke once said that they called themselves "the club of the like-minded, because no two thought alike." To their discussions were admitted Alcott, Hawthorne, the Peabody sisters, Margaret Fuller, Thoreau, Weiss, Bartol, and others, in addition to the leaders of the movement, the Ripleys, Emerson, Brownson, Hedge and James Freeman Clarke. As an evident outcome of the discussions for simplifying daily routine and reforming educational methods, came the Brook Farm community, with its varied history from 1841–1847. Here the Transcendental Club divided. Emerson, assured that the individual, not the community, must be basal in all reform, never eager for special scheme or method, was indifferent to such communities, as already shown. Ripley, however, determined to apply the theories which he had imbibed, purchased the famous farm in West Roxbury in 1840, planned for a corporate association, and attracted thither, during the next few years, many noted reformers and authors. Emerson enjoyed visits at

Brook Farm. He allowed his *Dial* to report the life there, since Margaret Fuller was one of his editors and also in residence at the community, but he was never influenced to identify himself with the communal life. This is not the place to portray further the life of this picturesque settlement with its commingled seraphic thought and manual work. Mr. Lindsay Swift, in his admirable study of Brook Farm, records that, after Alcott's visits and his nebulous symbolism, "the pie was always cut from the centre to the periphery," while a desire for butter was couched in the psychic phrase,—"Is the butter within the sphere of your influence?" One fact must be noted, that Brook Farm, as originally conceived, consisted of an association of individual families. The later influence of Albert Brisbane, promulgator of Fourierism and communism, was responsible for the change in constitution in 1844, which made it a Fourierian Phalanx, akin to the communities at Hopedale, Northampton and the "Ceresco," or Wisconsin, settlement.

With the same purpose as Brook Farm, but with briefer life, was the experiment of Alcott and his English friends, Lane and Wright, at Harvard, Massachusetts. This plan was executed in 1843, while Thoreau was at Staten Island, but sundry references to it are in the letters interchanged with

Emerson and Lane. In *The New England Magazine* for April, 1900, is an interesting article upon "The Alcotts in Harvard," outlining the life at "Fruitlands." The sixteen members of this family lived through the balmy summer "in harmony with the primitive instincts of man," when fruit and light clothing were acceptable amenities. The cold, dismal winter made such life unendurable and, in dismay, they left "Apple Slump," as Mrs. Alcott called the home that had proved another fiasco for this transmigratory family. Louisa Alcott's story, "Transcendental Wild Oats," portrays well the mingled joys and sorrows of the time, while her little poem, "Despondency," expresses the gloom, yet courage, of this girl of eleven years. Alcott in his journal gives a characteristic comment on this and similar experiments,—"None of us were prepared to actualize practically the ideal life of which we dreamed."

Thoreau visited "Fruitlands" but declined to become a member of the colony. In a letter to him from Lane, June 7, 1843, is a complimentary hint which doubtless preceded more urgent invitation. After describing the general topography of their farm of ninety acres, the writer says,—"On the estate are about fourteen acres of wood, part of it extremely pleasant as a retreat, a very sylvan

realization, which only wants a Thoreau's mind to elevate it to classic beauty." In that sentence is suggestion that Thoreau had already expressed desire for some retreat, some "sylvan realization." In truth, the Walden lodge was the outcome of a long, though vague, anticipation. From the communistic settlements of the time, Emerson and Thoreau both held aloof. Emerson's clear foresight and prudence realized their futility under existent conditions; he also disapproved of their restrictive character which seemed to him undemocratic, if not unpatriotic. He was, however, sufficiently impressed by the communistic spirit so that, in 1840, he invited the Alcott family to share his home and urged Mrs. Emerson to further simplify their domestic life by including the servants at the family dining-table. Mrs. Emerson thought the former plan "a wild scheme" but acquiesced. Mrs. Alcott's good sense, however, prompted her refusal to accept such unmeasured hospitality. The efforts at domestic social reform also proved futile because the two maids were quite unwilling to join the family at meals.

Thoreau's reasons for distrust of communism were resident in his antagonism to the fundamental idea. His trend of mind was wholly individualistic. He was never a disciple of communism, as *living*

together; he did, however, advocate cooperation, in the sense of *working together.* In "Walden" he says,—"To cooperate, in the highest as well as the lowest sense, means to get our living together." Deeply influenced by the reform theories of his friends, though averse to their schemes, lacking dependent home-ties, with his independent doctrine of self-expansion firmly planted, Thoreau had long planned to go into semi-retirement for study of nature, reflection and writing. Already he had tested his powers and inclinations and had so far "found himself" that he recognized his special gifts as nature-interpreter and poet. To more fully observe her forms and changes, to have leisure from sordid tasks for calm reflection, he wished to shut himself within some isolated retreat there to educe a philosophy of life. In the Commencement Conference, already mentioned, he had said;—"The order of things should be somewhat reversed; the seventh should be a man's day of toil, wherein to earn his living by the sweat of his brow; and the other six his Sabbath of the affections and the soul—in which to range this widespread garden and drink in the soft influence and sublime revelations of nature." Thus early had this nebulous fancy haunted him! In his journal, December 24, 1841, is recorded,—"I want to go soon and live away by the pond, where

I shall hear only the wind whispering among the reeds. It will be success if I shall have left myself behind. But my friends ask what I will do when I get there, — will it not be employment enough to watch the progress of the seasons?" About the same time are vague references to this plan of his in letters from Channing and Margaret Fuller.

This desire to sequester oneself from conflicting and exacting duties, and to develop the mental and religious life, was no uncommon incident of that age; indeed, it is the aspiration of many individuals in every age. All sections of America can point to some "hermitage" where a recluse has buried himself for purposes of study or religion, sometimes because of blighted affection, and thus has become an object of curiosity to the community. This idea of isolation by individuals and communities, this return to simple agrarian life, was pervasive through the atmosphere half a century ago. Among the college friends of Thoreau, already noted, was Charles Stearns Wheeler, whose tragic death in Germany in 1843, was a great grief to Emerson and Thoreau. His home was in Lincoln, four miles from Concord, and in 1841–2, that he might find time for study and save money for foreign travel, he built a shanty, "a woodland study," near Flint's Pond, midway between Lin-

coln and Concord. There is a tradition that Thoreau assisted him in constructing the hut; Mr. Channing is authority for the statement that Thoreau visited Wheeler there for six weeks. It is sure that this and other examples of the time, in retirement for study and economy, greatly influenced Thoreau in fostering his desire for a temporary home by the pond, in the midst of nature's peaceful beauty.

Before Walden was chosen, he wavered for a time after he had determined to build a lodge somewhere. In a letter recently seen, is this reference under date of 1841,—"I am sorry for Mr. Henry's disappointment about his farm." Doubtless this is the incident told in breezy style in the early chapters of "Walden,"—the effort to purchase the Hollowell farm on the road to Nine Acre Corner, with its gray, weather-beaten building, its red maple grove, and its rabbit-knawed apple-trees. With semi-satiric detail he explained;—"The nearest that I came to actual possession was when I bought the Hollowell place, and had begun to sort my seeds, and collected materials with which to make a wheelbarrow to carry it on or off with; but before the owner gave me a deed of it, his wife,—every man has such a wife,—changed her mind and wished to keep it, and he offered me ten

dollars to release him. Now, to speak the truth, I had but ten cents in the world, and it surpassed my arithmetic to tell, if I was that man that had ten cents, or who had a farm, or ten dollars, or all together. However, I let him keep the ten dollars and the farm too, I had carried it far enough; or rather, to be generous, I sold him the farm for just what I gave for it, and, as he was not a rich man, made him a present of ten dollars, and still had my ten cents, and seeds, and materials for a wheelbarrow left. I found thus that I had been a rich man without any danger to my poverty. But I retained the landscape, and I have since annually carried off what it yielded without any wheelbarrow."

The choice of Walden as final site for his lodge was probably decided by two dissimilar agencies. As he tells his readers one of his earliest memories was a ride to Walden woods and a fleeting, childish wish that he might live by the pond there. Later he found boyish pleasure in idling along its banks or building fires to attract the pouts close to its edge. Thus, the locality was associated not alone with his youth but also with the memories of his brother. The second decisive circumstance was the purchase by Emerson of some woodland along both shores of Walden, to supply him with fire-wood and

also give him a sense of ownership in his favorite walks. There can be no doubt that he planned to have a study on the opposite shore of the pond from that chosen by Thoreau. No place about Concord was more wildly picturesque and, at the same time, accessible for Thoreau's experiment than Walden. Distant about a mile and a half from the town centre, it is reached by a gradual incline, bordered by brambles, wayside flowers and trees of varied kinds. As the visitor looks across the meadow he recalls that Thoreau found a shorter path to the homes of his friends, a by-road traversing the fields and entering the main road just below Emerson's house and nearly opposite the "Wayside," then called "The Hillside," and at that time the home of Alcott. With the keen eye of a resident poet, Thoreau has described Walden Pond, the peculiar clarity and varying tints, blue, green, and gray, with the arching hills, from forty to one hundred and fifty feet high.

The legends, no less than the scenery, attracted him thither. This region, now consecrate to peaceful memories, was earlier a place of uncanny and gruesome traditions. It was an Indian haunt and Thoreau asserts that the pond may have been named from an Indian squaw, Walden, who escaped after a frightful pow-wow where the pro-

fanity was so extreme that there was an earthquake in warning and, at the concussion, the stones rolled down the hillside and thus formed the present paved shore. He also suggests another possible derivation ;—"If the name was not derived from some English locality,—Saffron Walden for instance,—one might suppose that it was originally called Walled-in-Pond." Later, it was the encampment of a band of outlaws whose evil deeds long frightened the Concord farmers and whose downfall from virtue was due to "a demon not distinctly named in old mythology, who has acted a prominent and astounding part in our New England life, and deserves as much as any mythological character, to have his biography written one day ; who first comes in the guise of a friend or hired man, and then robs and murders the whole family,—New England Rum." In this vicinity also lived for many years, Zilpha, the noisy witchlike singer and spinner, and her descendant, the quiet, yet awe-inspiring sooth-sayer, Zenda. Senator Hoar recalls a tradition of his boyhood, told by one Tommy Wyman whose hut was near Walden, that an Indian doctor dwelt in a hidden recess near the pond and would seize children and cut up their livers to make medicines.

Upon the north shore of the pond, just above its

SITE OF THOREAU'S HOUSE, WALDEN

Upon the north shore of the pond, just above its cove, Thoreau selected his site about forty yards from the water

cove, Thoreau selected his site about forty yards from the water. He delighted to call himself a "squatter" on Emerson's land, for this nomadic term well suited his mood. In the early spring of 1845 he associated yet another friend with his enterprise by borrowing Alcott's axe to hew his timbers. He states, with grim humor and exactness mingled, that he returned the axe sharper than when he received it. Happily he spent his days, felling and shaping and joining his timbers, never too busy to note each sight and sound of nature, the scream of the Walden owl, the movements of the pouts in the water, and each night he returned to his home. At last the frame was completed, the cellar dug, the planks bought from an Irishman's shanty, and the famous little lodge, ten feet by fifteen, with its snug closet, garret, window, two doors and fireplace, was raised by the friendly assistance of Alcott, Hosmer, and George William Curtis, then an inmate of Hosmer's home and an apprentice on his farm. With graceful tribute to these friends, Thoreau wrote in "Walden";—"No man was ever more honored in the character of his raisers than I. They are destined, I trust, to assist at the raising of loftier structures one day." The necessary plain furniture, not forgetting the desk and small looking-glass, as well as the cooking

utensils, were moved thither, his boat transferred to the cove, and on the Fourth of July, 1845, he became resident of this unique home, constructed by himself at a cost of $28.12½. The personal work in the structure of the house had for him a romantic, as well as economic, interest;—"Who knows but if men constructed their dwellings with their own hands and provided food for themselves and families simply and honestly enough, the poetic faculty would be universally developed as birds universally sing when they are so engaged. But alas! we do like cow-birds and cuckoos, which lay their eggs in nests which other birds have built and cheer no traveler with their chattering and unmusical notes." As the tourist stands in that tiny Thoreau room at the Concord Antiquarian Hall and looks at that cot, desk and chair preserved from the lodge, it is not difficult to picture the interior of the hut that gave opportunity for mental inspiration to the poet and naturalist. Mr. S. R. Bartlett, a frequent visitor, recalled that on the closet door was a sketch in pencil of a man feeding a tame mouse, an appropriate and suggestive decoration.

Reference has been made to this encampment at Walden as an experiment; for this term, we have Thoreau's own words, at least twice in the record of his life there. In the section on "Shelter" he

says,—"But to make haste to my own experiment;" again, he concludes,—"I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that, if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life that he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours." In retiring thus for a time for self-analysis and growth, he had three main motives,—to find the actual cost of the necessaries of civilized life, to gain an intimate and constant acquaintance with nature at all seasons, and to attend to what he calls "some private business,"—namely, to read, think, and record his observations, reflections, and practical experiences. He had a tentative belief that his special aptitude was writing, and writing of a particular, and then unusual, trend,—the preservation of poetic and philosophical ideas associated with nature-lore.

The residence at Walden has been too often misconstrued both as regards aim, general and personal, and also his actual life there. Professor Gates, in a recent study of Wordsworth, has said,—"At times it almost seems as if Wordsworth would have liked to have all men and women take to the woods." The same thought has been expressed often about Thoreau and the question has been raised regarding the "scheme" which

he proposed. He offered no scheme; rather he denied such intent in "Walden";—"I would not have any one adopt my mode of living on any account; for beside that before he has fairly learned it I may have found another for myself, I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would that each one be very careful to find out and pursue his own way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead." Could other words more fully proclaim his individualism and disclaim his dogmatism? Could any words more fully declare that this residence was an experiment and only that? In a nugget, he summarized his purpose,—"I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach."

Thoreau thus represented the theoretical inquiries of the Transcendentalists regarding the simplification of life and the real freedom of action and will. He was, also, deeply concerned with the practical question of sufficient income to maintain his needs and, at the same time, give him leisure to study and expand mentally and spiritually. With his proud, exact disposition, he was always industrious in the true meaning of the term, and punctilious about debts. He had tried teaching,

editing, surveying, pencil-making, and like pursuits, but he found these occupations so confining, with so little margin for the free, full expression of his higher nature, that he felt shriveled and rebelled against such mechanical thraldom. He believed, and proved by his experiment, that a student who was content to reduce his wants to the lowest ratio, who would combine in moderation manual work and mental improvement, could thus secure the greatest blessings of life. Like our Southern poet, Paul Hamilton Hayne, at Copse Hill, he found in the pine retreat invigoration for body and spirit. Here he would experimentalize with the bugbear, maintenance, regarding the four requisites of life,—shelter, food, fuel, and clothing,—here he would expand and train his mind and soul.

In no way was he anxious to pose as a hermit or even a strict recluse. Nearly every day he walked to the village, as he tells us, to see his family and friends and gather the news. He was within access of any real service which he might render, he was a popular host, and his life there as elsewhere, commingled "the human and the sylvan." Among magazine articles that exerted a modicum of unjust influence during his life was that in *Chamber's Journal*, November 21, 1857, entitled "An American Diogenes." It abounds in false statements and

unjust surmises; as example, "he lived lazily in a hut, in a lonely wood, subsisting on beans." Dr. Edward Emerson has said of this Walden incident, —"His own Walden camping was but a short experimental episode, and even then this very human and affectionate man constantly visited his friends in the village, and was a most dutiful son and affectionate brother."

On the practical side, as a personal experience, his experiment succeeded. For two years and a half he lived simply and healthily, easily meeting his necessary expenses by an occasional contract for surveying for some neighbor farmer, or by exchange or sale of his beans and other produce. At the same time, he had ample leisure for study and soul-expansion. To-day, one finds the spot near the highway where he sowed, hoed, and harvested vegetables, mainly beans, whose rows would aggregate seven miles, planting some for early, some for later, harvest. The beans became associated not alone with pleasurable physical exercise but also with constant thoughts of lofty scope. The bean was a classic vegetable, associated with myths and heroic history as well as with Roman agriculture. Perchance, Thoreau's poetic, classic-trained mind chose this distinctive vegetable for this reason, but, more probably, his Yankee thrift recognized that

the soil favored this commodity. In tribute of memory, he wrote,—"I came to love my beans, though so many more than I wanted. They attached me to the soil, and so I got strength like Antæus." Here spoke the poetic, well-rounded workman, who knew the glory of true work! He had close rivals in the woodchucks who "nibbled for me a quarter of an acre clean." He maintained, however, as did Lowell of birds in "My Garden Acquaintance," that the transgressors had prior rights of residence. Though he caught one in a trap, and confined him for a few hours, he refused to concur in any sentence more severe than transportation two miles away and a reprimand, accentuated by a stick; so the woodchuck departed in quest of pastures new. Thoreau was often amused at the comments heard from the roadway, as travelers passed in gigs, "with elbows on knees and reins hanging loosely in festoons." "Does he live there?" asks the black bonnet of the gray coat; "and the hard-featured farmer reins up his grateful dobbin to inquire what you are doing when he sees no manure in the furrow, and recommends a little chip dirt, or any little waste stuff, or it may be, ashes or plaster." What a vivid silhouette! Occasionally, he gave variety to his diet by a catch of fish from Walden or Flint Pond.

He became, however, far more of a poet and romanticist in his attitude towards nature during his lake-encampment. His substitute pleasure for angling was reverie in his boat on warm evenings, "playing the flute, and watching the perch, which I seemed to have charmed, hovering around me, and the moon traveling over the ribbed bottom, which was strewed with the wrecks of the forest."

This Walden experiment had potent influence in informing and educing the naturalist, both in scientific and poetic qualities. As he had anticipated, so he gained that intimate and wide knowledge of nature as is only revealed to one who lives in familiar communion with her through the varying changes of two complete seasons. One of his acknowledged purposes was to note the actual awakening of spring in the subtle, secretive phases of soil, woodland, sap, and insect. Eagerly he saw and compared the primal signs of release from hibernation of all vegetable and animal life; with exultant thrill he heard the first note of bird, the earliest buzz of bee, and the faintest chirp of the frog. In truth, as one traces the services of Thoreau as naturalist, he realizes that the first true revelation came to him in this very heart of nature, able to count her pulse-beats, free from the sordid distractions and cares of outside life.

Allusion has been made to "some private business" which Thoreau wished to accomplish at Walden. Mr. Channing is inclined to regard this as a restrictive reference to writing and he calls the hut "a writing-case." It is true that he already had essayed authorship but he felt the need of much preparation. His unique and conscientious nature sought years of reflection and observation before he was ready to say,—"My work is writing." The depth and complexity of his thoughts on nature and life distinguish his volumes from those of the casual author of books on similar themes. At Walden during the winter months he studied and wrote, reviewing in sad, yet placid, memory the week's voyage with his brother, and preparing the journal notes and interpolated thoughts for publication. He also recorded and compiled his observations on nature before and during the Walden residence. One must recall, however, that "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack," was not published until two years after he left Walden and that the book which commemorates his life in the woods was deferred, partly for financial reasons, for six years later. While writing formed part of his "private business," another important part was leisurely reflection and philosophic inquiry, combined with

assiduous study of the best classics, preparation for later authorship and lectures. In the section, entitled "Higher Laws," he writes,—"I found in myself, and still find, an instinct towards a higher, or, as it is named, a spiritual life, as do most men, and another towards a primitive, rank and savage one, and I reverence them both." Here was resident the dual pleasure in this Walden experience. It was essentially an oasis in a life of work. It was his "Sabbatical year," a dream yet a realization, an anticipation yet a preparation for nobler, fuller life. The life had been opened, the time of refreshment and preparation must end, and so he explains,—"I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps, it seemed to me that I had several lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one."

Thus far, we have reviewed Thoreau's life at Walden in its subjective aspect, and to many readers this would seem the only possible perspective. If we refuse to consider him as a hermit, however, another opinion must prevail. Speaking personally he declared,—"My life itself was become my amusement and never ceased to be novel." The words are as applicable to the objective side of the life, whose novelty has been the subject of unending criticism. In "Walden" he offers a few

glimpses of his relations with humanity during these two years. Occasional visitors and friends have furnished many other memories. He recites his daily life from the early morning bath in the pond and the floor-scrubbing, with all the furniture moved out in the sunlight, to his quiet evening hours either spent at his lodge or in the town, from which he returned to enjoy the whippoorwill or owl, with "its truly Ben Jonsonian scream," or to listen to the distant whistle of the train. One of the most interesting phases of his Walden life was the interchange of visits with his family and friends. A relative who often spent weeks with the Thoreau family has recalled their custom to visit him on Saturday afternoons, carrying some delicacies of cookery which he always accepted with pleasure. Frequently, he came into town to have dinner or tea with his own household or at the homes of Emerson, Alcott, or Hosmer. At the latter hearth-side he spent Sunday evenings, returning the visit which the farmer and some of his family always paid Thoreau Sunday afternoons. Miss Jane Hosmer kindly narrated to me her memories of these visits when, as a child, she accompanied her father to the famous little lodge, scrupulously neat, where Thoreau sat at his desk, her father in an adjacent chair, and the children on

"the bunk," listening, not always with patience, to the extended discussions on philosophy or Scandinavian mythology. As a result, she gained her primal instruction in that branch so that, in later years, she found herself compelled to translate Greek and Roman myths into her earlier models of Thor, Woden, and Igdrasil.

Thoreau always welcomed sincere visitors and true neighbors, from whatever distance. While still hewing his timber, he attracted an occasional rambler and adds,—"we chatted pleasantly over the chips which I had made." To him "Visitors" included animal friends, the native mice, the phœbe and the wasps. In the same chapter on his visitors he answers the suggestion of hermit, saying;—"I think that I love society as much as most, and am ready enough to fasten myself like a blood-sucker for a time to any full-blooded man that comes in my way. I naturally am no hermit, but might possibly sit out the sturdiest frequenter of the bar-room, if my business called me thither." Doubtless, he inherited some of the Dunbar loquacity, for he once said,—"I love dearly to talk," and friends testified to his wonderful conversational powers among congenial minds. In spite of such general statements and the addendum, given us in "Walden," that at one time he had "twenty-five or

thirty souls, with their bodies," in his woodland home, one must recognize that he best enjoyed his part as host when he required "the two chairs for friendship" rather than "the three for society." He could stir a hasty-pudding and bake a loaf of bread with one guest, though if twenty came, "there was nothing said about dinner." With an amusing touch of sarcasm on the housekeeping customs of his time, he adds,—"My 'best' room, however, my withdrawing room, always ready for company, on whose carpet the sun rarely fell, was the pine wood behind my house. Thither, in summer days, when distinguished guests came, I took them, and a priceless domestic swept the floor and dusted the furniture and kept the things in order."

Distinguished guests often came; sometimes, finding their host absent, they left a visiting-card of yellow walnut leaf, appropriately inscribed. In addition to the intellectual friends who were frequent callers, Emerson, Alcott, Ripley, Channing, and others, he had many chance visitors of all social grades. There came the Canadian woodchopper and philosopher, "a true Homeric or Paphlagonian man." Hither strolled men and women, boys and girls, fishermen, hunters, poets, farmers, doctors, and "uneasy housewives who

pried into my cupboard and bed when I was out." While he greeted all honest visitors with "Welcome, Englishmen," it would have been incompatible with his temperament if he had not arraigned the sham visitors, called thither by prurient criticism. With grim satire, he wrote;—"Finally, there were the self-styled reformers, the greatest bores of all who thought that I was forever singing,

> This is the house that I built;
> This is the man that lives in the house that I built;

but they did not know that the third line was

> These are the folks that worry the man
> That lives in the house that I built!"

At one time an impression was abroad that the Walden hut was a station in the underground railway for fugitive slaves, but this error has been corrected by Colonel Higginson. Thoreau mentions one "real runaway slave among the rest, whom I helped to forward towards the North Star."

All who have written or spoken their memories of this Walden lodge have testified to its neatness and charm and the quiet, cordial hospitality of its owner. In "Walden" is a subtle suggestion of a yearning and listening for "the visitor who never

comes," and again confession of "a little stagnation, it may be, about two o'clock in the afternoon." When he plastered his cabin during the first autumn, Channing was his guest for a fortnight; it seems unfortunate that he has not given the world a more adequate vision of such phases of the life of his friend. In the series of poems, commemorative of Thoreau, "The Wanderer," Channing has described lovingly the interior of the hut and his friend's general aspect. The use of the term, hermit, must not be considered literal, for Channing did not so construe Thoreau's nature, as many passages in his biography witness:

> "I loved to mark him,
> So true to nature. In his scanty cabin,
> All along the walls, he hid the crevice
> With some rustic thought,—a withered grass,
> Choice-colored blackberry vines, and nodding sedge
> Fantastically seeded; or the plumes
> The golden-rod dries in the fall; and tops
> Of lespedeza, brown as the Spanish mane;
> And velvet bosses quaintly cut away
> Off the compliant birches, of whose trunks
> This hermit blest made pillage."

Joseph Hosmer recalled a Sunday spent at Walden in September, 1845, "as pure and delightful as with my mother." From the spiritual uplift which he received he descends to a recital of the dinner, well-cooked and daintily served.

One can readily imagine the religious purity of such environment as that of Walden when "every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with nature herself." With his deeply-rooted religion, pantheistic though it was, and his free solitary thought and action, he records, "My days were not days of the week, bearing the stamp of any heathen deity, nor were they minced into hours and fretted by the ticking of a clock." Such assertion throws light upon an incident related to me by a friend of the Thoreaus, an unpublished anecdote which illumines some of his traits and his frequent misinterpretation. His mother had expressed a wish for a pine-tree of certain size for the yard and Henry, always eager to give pleasure to his family, found the desired tree one morning, pulled it up by the roots, and, balancing it upon his shoulder, started for his Concord home. Arrived at the town-centre, he noticed a number of people coming out of the church and then, for the first time, he remembered it was Sunday. Fifty years ago, in a village community, such disregard of the Sabbath seemed most culpable, both to Trinitarians and Unitarians. When he first realized his position, he might have stopped at any house on the road, "where he was always welcome," said my in-

formant, but any such concealment or device would be contrary to his open, sincere nature. With good motive he had started to bring home the pine-tree and, justifying his conscience, he sturdily bore his burden past the church amid the gaping, horrified people to his mother's yard. Of course, this incident, like many another in his life, was misconstrued as predetermined defiance of custom, and he suffered quietly the judgment which resulted, tenaciously refusing to explain.

Among many distorted ideas regarding the Walden experiment, one of the most flagrant is Mr. Lowell's conclusion,—"His shanty life was a mere impossibility, so far as his own conception of it goes, as an entire independency of mankind." What possible evidence, from his own words or those of his friends, is there for the assertion that Thoreau had any desire to establish or declare "the entire independency of mankind"? Recently, a gentleman, speaking of Thoreau in public, but with inadequate knowledge as later statements evidenced, said, with a half-sneer,—"He started out to live without any aid of civilized man and began by borrowing an axe and setting his hut on another's land without paying any rental." Such have been some of the unfair ideas promulgated by Mr. Lowell and other critics who would not, or, at least,

did not, read "Walden" with a fair, responsive mind. His distinct denial that he wished to form any band of hermits or that he desired to suggest a scheme of conduct, has already been quoted. In the early chapters of his life-record at Walden, he comments on the many questions asked regarding his life there, with its expense and details. If any one could gain profit by his experience or apply any of his lessons, it would be the student. Hence he addresses the book, in its early chapters, especially to "poor students. As for the rest of my readers, they will accept such portions as apply to them. I trust that none will stretch the seams in putting on the coat, for it may do good service to him whom it fits." He had scanty expectation that his experiment would be followed by many or that the hut would be of further use to him as residence. He made no effort to preserve it and it soon suffered removal. In letters to Mr. Emerson are sundry references to the gardener, Hugh Whelan, who in 1847, "has his eye on the Walden *Agellum* and who seeks to take the field and house and evolve therefrom a garden and a palace." Hugh, however, had "long differences with strong beer" and his magic anticipations vanished before his unsteady habits, so the hut became the property of a farmer who moved it on the old Carlisle road, where it re-

mained a granary and tool-house until a few years after Thoreau's death.

There have been some experiments modeled after this Walden life that are unrecorded in accessible form, but the most familiar was the encampment at Walden in 1869–1870 of a young theological student, Edmund Stuart Hotham, of New York. Here, in a rude cabin, he studied theology and is referred to by Channing in "The Wanderer." Among many readers of "Walden" none have gained more recent notice than "A Victim of Thoreau," so humorously sketched by Dr. Charles C. Abbott in his "Recent Rambles." In a woodland stroll he met this "philosophic tramp" who could repeat pages of "Walden" but who had decided, by sad experience, that "Thoreau's philosophy won't work." Conversation disclosed the fact that he had tried the Walden plan with improvements, or rather with omissions, since energy and industry seemed lacking in his plan. His complaint was that he could not "get a living" by passive delight in nature and spasmodic cultivation of a bean-field.

The Walden encampment has too often been exaggerated as well as distorted. In it Thoreau was neither a hermit nor a misanthrope. It formed simply a climax to his years of preparation. Mr.

Salt says, with force and succinctness,—"He was a student when he went to Walden; when he returned to Concord, he was a teacher." His residence amid the elemental, uplifting forces of nature had brought him temporal health and happiness and permanent knowledge of nature and life in its simple, fontal issues. In the woods he learned the "essential facts," a lesson to which he was to give expression in future years. No expansion of this thought could equal his own admirable conclusion in "Walden":—"He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them."

Viewed from the focus of to-day, which often yearns for but seldom attains real privacy with nature and simplification of life, this seclusion of Thoreau has a far different aspect from that of its

contemporaneous decade. It was then one of many experiments for reforming and simplifying conditions of society, for applying transcendental ideas. It was entirely parallel to the communities and sociological ventures of the age. It was the experiment of a philosopher who had no affiliations with communal plans but who sought their aim,— expansion of all the faculties and reduction of the demands of society to the lowest terms. With reference to the Walden incident, as revelation of the character of Thoreau, no words are more pertinent than the simple, sincere lines of his poet-friend applied, as were many of Channing's stanzas, to both Emerson and Thoreau: —

"More fitting place I cannot fancy now
For such a man to let the line run off
The mortal reel, such patience hath the lake,
Such gratitude and cheer are in the pines.
But more than either lake or forest's depths
This man hath in himself ; a tranquil man,
With sunny sides where well the fruit is ripe,
Good front, and resolute bearing to this life,
And some serener virtues which control
This rich exterior prudence ; virtues high,
That in the principles of things are set.
Great by their nature and consign'd to him,
Who, like a faithful merchant does account
To God for what he spends, and in what way."

The Years of Expression

CHAPTER V

THE YEARS OF EXPRESSION

IT is not difficult to assert, with seeming evidence of proof, that Thoreau's life, brief and unique, consisted entirely of years of preparation for the expression which never came. His mere life-incidents, read by a casual eye, seem trivial, vacillating experiments while his life has often been accounted a failure in achievement of any definite aims. One may, however, well recall the lesson of "Rabbi Ben Ezra,"—

> "For thence,—a paradox
> Which comforts while it mocks,—
> Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail."

The fifteen years of life after the Walden experiment witnessed no remarkable acts but they showed an increasing and sturdy expression of strong character that was fast maturing and that had gained a brighter, surer vision of the inner and loftier phases of life than has often been achieved in such a brief period. In a letter from a relative of the Thoreau family, loaned for use here, are two or three sentences that contained unconscious prophecy

of the chosen form of expression during Thoreau's later years, though the writer failed entirely to comprehend the true purport of that expression. While Thoreau was in New York in 1843, occasionally visiting this relative, the latter wrote,—"I think he (Thoreau) is getting to view things more as others do than formerly,—he remarked he had been studying books, now he intended to study nature and daily life. It would be well!" There is a fund of latent sarcasm and family censure in that final, laconic sentence. This resolve made by Thoreau, at Staten Island, as a result of tentative years, became his life-profession,—to study nature and life, in poetic and philosophic phases, and to express this communion of ideas in authorship. Walden was the climactic step in his undistracted devotion to the messages of nature. Here also he served apprenticeship to literature as a profession. Already several poems and essays had appeared from his pen in *The Dial* and other journals. During the months at Walden he wrote the essay on "Thomas Carlyle and his Works," which appeared in *Graham's Magazine*. In addition to the definite material for his first two books, largely gathered and evolved by the little lake-retreat, he had, also, scattered thoughts and observation on nature and life which were destined to form the

nucleus of much of his best literary work, published posthumously.

It is true that, immediately on leaving Walden, he again entered the Emerson home, as secretary and business agent, while Mr. Emerson was in England. In Thoreau's letters, however, one notes a change of tone from that of the resident of four years earlier. There is greater self-reliance, more surety of purpose both as regards his own work and affairs at large. A witty, cheery kindliness, full of references to the delights of the Emerson home-life, characterize his letters to the absent father, some of which we shall note later. Allusions are made to his magazine papers, to his efforts to secure a publisher, and suggestions of other prophetic "reveries before my green desk in the chamber at the head of the stairs." Doubtless, the disappointment expressed in Emerson's letters from England, where, despite all social attentions, he felt lack of deep purpose and response to his idealism, influenced Thoreau. The latter had clearly contemplated a visit abroad, for Emerson advised him to publish his book before he came, that his literary reputation might bring him *entrée* into English society.

No man had a deeper reverence for the profession of authorship than had Thoreau. In his very

nature he abhorred and disdained the compromising, often insincere, shifts of aspirants for publication. His real aspiration and joy, like that of all true scholars and authors, was in the creation and expression, not in the publication. The latter was subsidiary and resorted to mainly at the urgence of friends and for financial ends. On this point, he wrote Mr. Elliot Cabot in 1848, as included in "Familiar Letters,"—"Time & Co., are after all, the only quite honest and trustworthy publishers that we know. I can sympathize, perhaps, with the barberry bush, whose business it is solely to ripen its fruit (though that may not be to sweeten it) and to protect it from thorns, so that it can hold on all winter, even, unless some angry crows come to pluck it. But I see that I must get a few dollars together presently to manure my roots. . . . At any rate, I mean always to spend only words enough to purchase silence with, and I have found that this which is so valuable, though many writers do not prize it, does not cost much, after all." This indifference to publication was induced, in part, by disappointments; in part, it was the expression of his constant plea for absolute independence of thought and form, without any restrictions imposed by printers or public. He continued to accumulate thoughts and observations for the books

which, after his death, would give to the reading-world unique pleasure, and, to their author, tardy fame.

If Thoreau's profession during his mature life was clearly authorship, it had a specific range,— "study of nature and of life," the work of the naturalist and the poet-philosopher. Excursions, fifty years ago a rarity in comparison with to-day, were purposeless rambles to the majority of participants. Excursions for study, as conducted by Thoreau, were novelties in his day but are common current experiences. In this respect, as in others, was he distinctly "fifty years in advance of his times." The memorable excursion of 1839 with his brother on the Concord and Merrimack rivers, was the first of many extended trips for study of botany, ornithology, and their allied branches. While in encampment at Walden, in 1846, he spent two weeks in the Maine woods, finding special pleasure in the study of Indian words and customs. The combined accounts of this excursion and the later one with Channing in 1853–4, were not published until after Thoreau's death but the first study in the later series, "Ktaadn and the Maine Woods," appeared in *Sartain's Union Magazine*, through the influence of Mr. Greeley, in 1848; for it, Thoreau received twenty-five dollars. Graham, after compulsion by Mr. Greeley, had also paid seventy-five

dollars for the article on Carlyle,—excellent prices for those days.

An exhaustive and just study of nature requires not alone familiarity with forest and meadow, but also with sea and shore. For this purpose he made the excursions of 1849, 1850, and 1855, recorded in "Cape Cod," portions of which appeared in *Putnam's Magazine* before Thoreau died. Another expedition destined to play an important part in his literary remains was to Canada in 1850 with Channing, when they styled themselves the "Knights of the Umbrella and the Bundle." In his letters and journals for 1847 to 1850 are sundry suggestions of the slow, yet sure, appreciation which was coming to Thoreau as a man of thought and literary ability, namely, invitations to lecture before lyceums and smaller audiences. In his first day-book is mention of his primal attempt at such lecture before the Concord Lyceum in 1838. Occasional mention is made of writing lectures during 1840 to 1845, but one can well understand that his radical and fearless utterances on church and state would disqualify him for any cautious lyceum during these years of conflict over slavery. The restriction on the lyceum seems to have been circumvented in Plymouth, as it was elsewhere, by arranging special services on Sundays, for the

THOREAU'S MAIN STREET HOUSE

Photogravure from a photograph

benefit of such noted abolitionists as Emerson, Higginson, Alcott, Garrison, Quincy, Mrs. Foster, and others. Here, at Leyden Hall, under the care of his friends, the Watsons, Thoreau lectured in February, 1852. He also lectured in Boston the same year at the Mechanics Apprentice's Library, as arranged by Colonel Higginson. In an interesting review of the Concord Lyceum by Judge Hoar, it is stated that Thoreau lectured before this organization nineteen times, while Emerson's lectures reached the remarkable number of ninety-eight. Thoreau also gave lectures in Salem, New Bedford, Fitchburg, Providence, and elsewhere in New England. In a letter to Emerson in 1848, as cited by Mr. Sanborn, he says, —" Lectures begin to multiply on my desk. I have one on Friendship which is new, and the materials of some others. I read one last week to the Lyceum on the Rights and Duties of the Individual in Relation to Government, —much to Mr. Alcott's satisfaction." One may conclude that the ideas promulgated were radical and bold. One of the few journeys Thoreau enjoyed was to Perth Amboy and Eagleswood in 1856, where he lectured and surveyed land for Mr. Marcus Spring, the friend of Alcott.

Opinions seem diverse regarding Thoreau's success as a lecturer. He could never be compared

with Emerson, whom Lowell has called "the most steadily attractive lecturer in America," with a diction like "homespun cloth-of-gold." Thoreau's voice was musical, his subject matter always unique, sometimes stultifying, but he lacked that magnetic charm of manner and the gracious conciliation which allured the audiences of Emerson, even if to many his thoughts were supra-mundane. Thoreau's recall to some places testified to a degree of success, though he wrote in extravagant self-depreciation,—"I am from time to time congratulating myself on my general want of success as a lecturer; apparent want of success, but is it not a real triumph? I do my work clean as I go along, and they will not be likely to want me again, so there is no danger of my repeating myself, and getting to be a barrel of sermons, which you must upset and begin with again." Like Emerson, Thoreau used the lecture as a means rather than an end and he often rebelled, as did Emerson, against the necessary interruption to his more deep and spontaneous thought. He felt "cheapened" by the trifling exactions often made by an audience,—the emphasis which they laid upon personal relations with the lecturer, their inability to understand without detailed explanations, and their total misunderstanding of his entire thought. Thoreau was so independent and sincere

that this union of dullness and triviality annoyed him sorely and to his journal he confided some of his irritation. "Many will complain of my lectures, that they are transcendental and they can't understand them. 'Would you have us return to the savage state,' etc., a criticism true enough it may be, from their point of view. But the fact is that the earnest lecturer can speak only to his like, and adapting himself to his audience is a mere compliment which he pays them. . . . If you wish me to speak as if I were you, that is another matter."

In Worcester, Massachusetts, he lectured often, almost annually from 1849 to 1861. His friend, Mr. Harrison G. O. Blake, to whom more attention will be given under Thoreau's friends, began correspondence in March, 1848. From this time, Mr. Blake and another friend, Mr. Theophilus Brown, arranged lectures in Worcester before small, interested audiences, generally in the parlors of Mr. Blake's school. A small admittance fee was charged to meet expenses. As elsewhere, the audience was of two minds. Some were thrilled and stimulated to higher, nobler life; others, says a lady who attended many of the lectures, "could not understand what he meant and thought it was all nonsense." Another Worcester auditor has told me of her utter bewilderment at a lecture "all

about beans," which he delivered at the City Hall. Her impression is borne out by a chance sentence noted in Alcott's "Concord Days," where he says of Thoreau,—"At Worcester he read a damaging-institution lecture on Beans which has never got to print." A lady, who was his hostess on occasions in Worcester, has expressed in strong analogy her memory of his face and bearing,—"He always reminded me of an eagle, ready to soar to great heights or to swoop down on anything he considered evil."

In addition to these personal memories, graciously recalled, there is a report of a lecture in the *Worcester Ægis* for January 10, 1855. Thoreau's subject was "The Connection between Man's Employment and his Higher Life." The detached extracts in the half-column review have a most familiar sound for readers of Thoreau, for they are largely incorporated in his journal pages edited by Mr. Blake. Among significant sentences are these;—"The farmer is a worthy subject for an epic, when he cultivates at the same time his land and himself, so as to secure the best progress, physical and spiritual." . . . "It is the great art of life to turn the surplus life of the soul into life for the body." . . . "Conversation degenerates into gossip when people resign their inward life."

Among other lectures which he read in Worcester in 1857 were the favorites, "Autumnal Tints" and "Walking," both published in the *Atlantic* the same year as his death. The first lecture contained some of his most vivid and poetic descriptions of nature. With rapture he catalogued the varieties of Red Maples, declaring of the autumn brilliance that "if such a phenomenon occurred but once, it would be handed down by tradition to posterity and get into the mythology at last." With an artist's eye, he urged the planting of bright-tinted trees along the village street as stimulant to beauty and cheer of living. In his journal for February 25, 1859, Thoreau recorded that the only criticism this lecture brought in Worcester was denial of his statement that his auditors had not *seen* as many beauties of nature as they assumed to admire. He reiterates his belief "that they have not seen much of them, that there are very few people who do see much of nature,"—a comment of absolute truth for his own time and for all times.

Using his own experience as a text, the lecture on "Walking" abounded in precepts upon proper equipment, motive and direction, and the spirit which would alone bring exhilaration. Some of these didactic statements form an interesting commentary upon the age prior to our own. To-day,

when walking has been inculcated into the creed of all well-developed men and women, with present-day costumes adapted for outdoor life, his words have a ring of prophecy as well as remonstrance, while to his contemporaries they seemed merely defiant of conventionalities. In a burst of whimsicality, doubtless caused by some tiresome visitor, he wrote on a journal page, included in "Autumn,"—"I do not know how to entertain those who cannot take long walks. The first thing that suggests itself is to get a horse to draw them, and that brings me at once in contact with the stables and dirty harness, and I do not get over my ride for a long while. I give up my forenoon to them, and get along pretty well, the very elasticity of the air and the promise of the day abetting me; but they are heavy as dumplings by mid-afternoon. If they can't walk, why won't they take an honest nap in the afternoon and let me go? But when two o'clock comes, they alarm me by an evident disposition to sit. In the midst of the most glorious Indian summer afternoon, there they sit, breaking your chairs and wearing out the house, with their backs to the light, taking no note of the lapse of time." With special force, he urged elimination of all sordid or anxious thoughts when we are walking. The primal aim should be not exercise, though that is second, but rather pure affinity

of senses, mind and soul with nature. Very explicit are the directions for equipment for a long journey on foot, "the cheapest way to travel and the way to travel the farthest in the shortest distance." For paraphernalia one needs an umbrella, (he drolly recalls that he was once taken for an umbrella mender) a dipper, a spoon, a fish-line, some Indian meal, some salt, and some sugar. Lacking the amenities of modern outing garb, which perhaps he would have rejected had they then been in vogue, he urges the use of old clothes for journey-wear. The traveler in his fine clothes is treated as guest, not friend. "Instead of going in quietly and sitting by the kitchen fire, he would be shown into a cold parlor, there to confront a fire-board and excite a commotion in the whole family. The women would scatter at his approach, and the husbands and sons would go right off to hunt up their black coats, for they all have them."

"Wild Apples" which appeared in the *Atlantic* for November, 1862, was another successful lecture. A Concord schoolboy recorded that this lecture made the audience laugh at first, but "it was the best lecture of the season, and at its close there was long, continued applause." Thoreau's wide knowledge of poetry, mythology, and horticulture, enabled him to recount with grace and rare interest

the rôles played by apples in legend and history, the distinctive qualities of seed, flavor, and aroma. The lecture closed with a panegyric to "The Saunterer's Apple," which not even a saunterer can eat in the house, since it requires "the November air for sauce."

In 1849, the Thoreau family made their last removal, from the "Texas House" to the "Yellow House" on Main Street; this had been enlarged from a cottage by Henry and his father. Another loss had come to the family circle in the death of Helen, from consumption, in 1849. The advancing years brought illness and dependence to his father, and Henry refused an invitation for a lecture and another for a visit, writing "my father is very sick and has been for a long time, so that there is the more need of me at home." He never wavered as faithful son or brother. He aided in the family business, and varied his studies with mechanical work, to meet the needs of the household. In a volume of his journal in original form, kindly shown me by the present executor of these precious books, Prof. E. Harlow Russell, among some loose sheets, are old letters whose reverse sides contain some of his nature-notes. Here are business letters from New York houses placing orders and acknowledging receipt of plumbago from Henry Thoreau.

In 1853, he records that by surveying, in which he was always expert, he made a dollar a day for seventy-six successive days' work. Perhaps this statement explains the unique comment on Thoreau by a so-called historian of Concord,—"His profession was that of a surveyor and it is easy to imagine how, with his poetic temperament, while laying out roads and measuring wood-lots, he came to be what he was." Could there be a more complete reversal of facts? In such a picture he becomes Admetus serving some Apollo.

In 1849–1850 he says that he manufactured one thousand dollars' worth of pencils and finally sacrificed them in price to pay a debt of one hundred dollars. Probably this work, and some of the returns from surveying, paid the expense of his first book, issued by Munroe of Boston in 1849. This account of the week's excursion on the Concord and Merrimack rivers, gained a few favorable reviews, among them Lowell's in *The Massachusetts Quarterly*, quite different in tone from his later sharp, piquant essay, to receive attention in another chapter. Favorable reviews, however, do not always ensure buyers, and the volume was doomed to join that long list of the unsold. The story is familiar of the return, in 1853, of seven hundred copies of this first edition, which Thoreau

bore doggedly upon his back to his attic study, declaring that he had now a library of "nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself." To-day, the 1861 edition of "A Week," published by Ticknor, commands a fabulous price. It contains on a fly-leaf at the end, an announcement, "To Appear Soon, 'Walden' by the same Author." As "Walden" was published in 1854, this amusing and telltale oversight discloses the fact that the later publishers bought those seven hundred copies and sold them as part of this later edition.

No one can question that Thoreau's sensitive heart was hurt by this early rebuff in authorship yet he applied nobly his philosophy of complacency and contentment. It was not pure stoicism or egotism that called forth the words,—"Indeed, I believe that this result is more inspiring and better than if a thousand had bought my wares. It affects my privacy less and leaves me freer." A man of less courage and confidence in his powers might have here ended his literary career. Thoreau, however, had prepared with care, and with greater variety and uniqueness of theme, his experiences at Walden. This was published by Ticknor in 1854. Some unpleasant, distorted strictures upon the volume appeared, but criticism, in the main, was

favorable. The public at least was interested and, in two years, the publishers sold two thousand copies. Comment upon these books must be reserved for a later chapter. Though "Walden" was never a work to catch popular fancy, in the fleeting sense of the term, it gained a sure and increasing hold upon the reading-public of the higher grades and established Thoreau's reputation as an author, naturalist and philosopher. The words which he used in general application in his journal for November 20, 1857, are especially pertinent for "Walden";—"It is not the book of him who has traveled farthest on the surface of the globe, but of him who has lived the deepest and been the most at home."

As Thoreau's life neared its close and his reputation became established, national affairs approached a climax, destined to further increase public interest in this man and evidence his strong, lofty character. Like nearly all the radical thinkers of his day, he had long censured the lax and corrupt politics of his time, for history repeats itself in such conditions in every generation. In Thoreau's case this opposition had a definite cause and was given a bold, defiant expression. Among the scattering incidents, always associated with his memory, is the fact that, while at Walden, he had been arrested

and spent a night in jail because he persistently refused to pay his state tax. This occurrence, like many another incidental to his character-unfolding, was wholly misconstrued. It was regarded as a deed of silly, affected defiance to custom, whereas it was one of the most simple and consistent expressions of his firm, basal principles. Eight years before he had refused to pay the church tax and had seceded quietly but firmly from church attendance, though Emerson, in his journal, speaks of him as an occasional attendant. He was then teaching, and he saw no logic for payment of a tax to support the minister unless the minister should pay a sum for the support of the teacher. He was no anarchist in his refusal to meet the demands of state, but he was a radical, bold reformer. His demand was for "a government which establishes justice in the land," and he was averse to recognizing any claims of a government which violated its foundation stone of liberty.

The abolition element was coming to the fore in subtle channels. Thoreau's was not the only refusal to support a government which had acquiesced in the Mexican War and was willing to pamper slave-owners. Often Thoreau seemed to follow the example of his friends or, rather, to carry their ideas to some extreme issue. In writing Emerson in

1843, he mentions Alcott's refusal to pay his taxes and his narrow escape from arrest; his opposition was fully concurred in by Thoreau and Alcott's English friend, Lane. In "Walden" is a simple yet dramatic recital of Thoreau's own experience: —"One afternoon, near the end of the first summer, when I went to the village to get a shoe from the cobbler's, I was seized and put into jail, because, as I have elsewhere narrated, I did not pay a tax to or recognize the authority of the state which buys and sells men, women, and children, like cattle at the door of the state-house." Samuel Staples, the jailor, whose recent death has removed another link between Thoreau's Concord and the town of to-day, delighted to recount his prisoner's demeanor, his interested study of his fellow-prisoners, his anger when his Aunt Maria in disguise paid his tax, his reluctance to leave the jail, and his departure, with his mended shoe, as "captain of a huckleberry-party." While these incidents have semblance to the acts of a mere *poseur*, they yet indicate the fontal source of Thoreau's opposition. In the essay upon "Civil Disobedience," he complains of the false interpretation placed upon this experience in jail;—"I felt as if I alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax. They plainly did not know how to treat me but behaved like persons who are under-

bred. In every threat and in every compliment there was a blunder; for they thought that my chief desire was to stand on the other side of that stone wall. I could not but smile to see how industriously they locked the door on my meditations, which followed them out again without let or hindrance, and they were really all that were dangerous."

Among the side-lights upon this tax episode was the significant dialogue between Emerson and Thoreau, when the former visited his friend in jail and asked, "Henry, why are you here?" Thoreau's answer, so often misquoted, was, "Why are you not here?" This should not be construed as pertness or lack of deference. It was a calm, judicial, and perhaps Yankee, counter-question, expressing his firm belief that all who opposed slavery in thoughts and words, among whom was Emerson, should be willing to show that opposition in deed, even at the risk of being counted as eccentrics, perhaps law-breakers. In the essay on "Civil Disobedience," he emphasized this idea and urged the Abolitionists to refuse support to the state until it should declare itself against slavery. Such course, involving incarceration in county jail, if maintained by "ten honest men only,—ay, if one honest man ceasing to hold slaves,—it would be the abolition of slavery in America."

From the focus of this century it is not difficult to laud, as brave and prophetic, Thoreau's words and deeds, for the world has grown in admiration of true heroism in whatever form, but to his contemporaries, while they deplored existent conditions, such bold, decisive steps savored of anarchy. It was that critical decade before the courage of conviction and action had awakened, and many brave men advocated the doctrine of patience and silence. A reformer or prophet can never be understood by his neighbors,—his deeds and words need the light of subsequent events and balanced judgments after white heat has subsided, or they will lack true interpretation. One can readily revert to the conditions of sixty years ago and imagine the effect, in a small village, of such an unprecedented excitement as Thoreau's lodgment in jail. Probably the surprise was less astounding in this case than it would have been if related of any other villager. The years, however, passed quietly by, the man pursued his serene life, avoiding all publicity, writing his books and essays, reading his lectures, making an occasional excursion, or spending a few consecutive weeks at surveying or pencil-making, years of industry, sturdiness, and creation, years of service to family and friends, years of quiet, sure expression of the nature-lore, the liter-

ary treasures, the lofty ideals and noble principles which were his.

During these same years national affairs were also approaching their crucial expression. The compromise of 1850, the new, more stringent, fugitive slave law of the same year, the Kansas-Nebraska bill, the long, fierce struggle in Kansas, the attack upon Charles Sumner in the Senate in 1856, the Dred Scott case, and the final message of the President urging the admission of Kansas with the stigma of slavery as her entrance-fee,—these and similar acts of this intense period awakened the lethargic North, and especially New England, to a realization of the deluge of tyranny which threatened to sweep over the republic and bear away her sacred "name and fame." Concord had long been excited over the question of anti-slavery. In 1837, Emerson had made there an address on this subject and to Concord, at sundry times, for personal and political sympathy, had come the four great leaders of abolition,—Garrison and Parker, Phillips and Sumner. As in all New England towns, however, there was a division of sentiment, deep, almost violent. In Boston and her contiguous towns the higher grades of society opposed the movement and visited, with social scorn, their own representatives, Phillips and Sumner, no less than the men of the

common people. To many noble, progressive thinkers of the time, the abolition movement seemed full of injustice to property-holders at North and South. They feared also the violent disruption and riots sure to result from the radical application of such principles. Many shared Hawthorne's feeling,—and many share it to-day with added strength after the conflict has left its aftermath of tragic race-problems,—we "could not see the thing at so long a range." Few of the reformers knew much of the actual status at the South from any personal inspection. Many of the criticisms and some of the proposed measures were not alone rabid but fraught with danger to the nation. The movement, however, in the main, was the natural outgrowth of the spirit of freedom, bodily, mental, and religious, which swept over the world during the last century. Emphasis of the latent good in all men, and their possible progress in mind and soul, fostered this primal defiance to bondage of the negroes. The abolitionists held a convention in Concord in 1844. The churches refused to open their doors, so the meeting was held in the Court-House. Thoreau asked for and gained permission for its use and he rang the bell, with all the vigor of muscle which was his, and Emerson made a thrilling address advo-

cating the possible benefits of education for freed negroes.

Thoreau, as remonstrant in potent, dramatic form, was destined to stand with many of his friends, rather than alone, as the years passed with their messages of hazard and state-corruption. The Fugitive Slave Law and the Anthony Burns affair of 1854 kindled Thoreau's wrath to strong words. Alcott said that, after the return of Simms, Thoreau, in defiant satire, urged his townsmen to paint their Revolutionary monument black, "as a symbol of the dreadful treason." John Brown came to Concord to visit Mr. Sanborn in 1857 and then Thoreau met the man whose character he had long admired. There seemed an immediate affinity between the two men, both keen lovers of nature and legend, both inflexible in moral fibre, both somewhat fanatical in ideas of government, both glad to risk life for principle. Mr. Burroughs has called Thoreau the spiritual brother of Brown,—"the last and final flowering of the same plant,—the seed flowering; he was just as much of a zealot, was just as gritty and unflinching in his way." John Brown's character and career moved Thoreau at two points, —as reformer and as poet. He admired the life-risking defiance to an unjust, slave-permitting government, but he also appreciated the dramatic and

romantic in Brown's deeds and tragic end. In his journal, he reiterated his recognition that his "extracts of the noblest poetry are applicable in part or whole as Brown's elegy, eulogy, or oration." His keen interest and sympathy with this man interfered with all his usual delights; it seems to have disturbed his complacency and shattered his philosophy of serene mind more than any other single life-incident. Even a beautiful sunset failed to win him from contemplation of the wrong, both committed and endured. His active part in the agitation over the famous raid took the form of public utterances of force and eloquence during those seven weeks after the arrest of Brown, in October, 1859. Public interest ran high during this interim. Compromise was no longer possible. Brown was either a hero or a lunatic.

Emerson, no less than Thoreau, allowed his serenity to be displaced by irritation and anxiety during this excitement. He called Brown "that new saint"; he endured calmly the hisses of a Boston mob as he eulogized, with rare feeling, Lovejoy the Abolitionist, whose tragic death in the west had been prophetic of later martyrdom. He eagerly advocated war rather than any compromise which should be "an unjust peace." The three Concord philosophers, turning from nebulous ideals

to practical politics, displayed unsurpassed energy and courage. We recalled their forceful prophecies of the possible educative results for the negroes at the dedication of the Robert Shaw monument in Boston in May, 1898. Booker T. Washington was given the ovation of this occasion as he uttered his magnetic words which established, beyond all doubt, the actual mental power, at least in one example, evolved by education and encouragement from one born and bred in slavery and now recognized throughout the world as among the most honored of Americans.

In that rare volume, "Echoes from Harper's Ferry," edited by James Redpath in 1860, Thoreau's "Plea for Captain Brown" has initial place, beside orations by Emerson and Wendell Phillips. A chance allusion in a letter indicates that Thoreau tried to get his plea printed for the benefit of the Brown family,—another evidence of his genuine helpfulness. At the commemoration services at Concord in December, 1859, Thoreau had the most important part. His personal remarks show how strongly he was moved by the pathos of the affair. He referred with emotion to the woman, (wife of Judge Russell) who visited Brown in prison to mend his sabre-riven clothes and brought away, as a sacred memento, a pin marked with blood-stains.

In addition to the original comments, full of tender feeling, Thoreau read quotations from elegies and odes, showing a wide and careful selection. Among the authors cited were Schiller, Wordsworth and Tennyson, with a translation of his own from Tacitus. He also quoted "The Soul's Errand," the poem attributed to Sir Walter Raleigh when awaiting threatened execution; there was especial significance in the last stanza, for Thoreau, with others, had sought permission from the town officers to toll the bell on the day of Brown's death, but the faint-hearted magnates had demurred. Hence, Thoreau italicized with voice the lines:

"When I am dead,
Let not the day be writ,
Nor bell be tolled.
Love will remember it
When hate is cold."

Thoreau's address in behalf of Brown, after the arrest, was delivered in Concord on Sunday evening, October 30th, and was repeated the following week in Boston, Worcester, and elsewhere. Some friends deprecated this boldness and dreaded lest Thoreau's arraignment of the government might bring him arrest. Little recked he the result,—his duty was to speak and, if possible, awaken public conscience and national courage. His ad-

dress, even read at the present day, is trenchant and magnetic. He transcended his usual powers of language and was listened to, says Emerson, "by many with a sympathy that surprised themselves." In the Worcester *Spy* for November 3, 1859, I found the announcement for the address,—"As Mr. Thoreau never deals in commonplaces,—as he considers Brown a hero,—and as he has been so moved by the Harper's Ferry affair as to feel compelled to leave his customary seclusion in order to address the public, what he has to say is likely to be worth hearing." Surely, it so proved! The opening sentence was a graceful, strong explanation of his attitude,—"I trust that you will pardon me for being here. I do not wish to force my thoughts upon you, but I feel forced myself." He recounts his own deep disturbance in the cause,—his inability to read or sleep, and the urgent sentences written in the dark,—the plea not for Brown's life so much as for his character,—"his immortal life." With the force of a seer he spoke to the slave-committed South,—"Prepare yourselves for a settlement of that question, that must come up for settlement sooner than you are prepared for it. . . . You may dispose of me very easily, I am nearly disposed of now; but this question is still to be settled,—this negro question, I mean; the end of that is not yet."

In a dual sense were his words prophetic,—both as regards his country and himself. The agitation ripened fast; the conflict he had foreseen, and foretold, came apace. His latent reference to his own death was as speedily fulfilled. To many he seemed now at the very prime of age and power. His development had been slow and experimental, his recognition as author, naturalist, and reformer, had at last been bestowed. His unique, yet strong, philosophy of life had been shaped and tested; his knowledge of nature, poetry, and Indian lore was rare and extensive, ready for expression in literary forms of new and recognized value. His home-life as companion and care-taker for mother and sister was affectionate and satisfying. He had many devoted and dependent friends. He had become a force in national affairs at a time when such sympathies were sure to broaden and ennoble the best manhood. At forty-two years of age, with all these prospects before him, his health had failed, his active work was nearly done. Only months of patient endurance and a few last expressions of mind and soul remained.

There has always seemed a paradox in the fact that the man who lived four or five hours a day in the open air when it was possible, who walked and bivouacked amid the pine woods, whose phys-

ical and muscular fibre seemed untiring, with what Emerson called "an oaken strength," should have succumbed to a lingering consumption, before half his days of rightful life were spent. As intimated, the disease had been a family blight, fastened upon both the Thoreaus and the Dunbars. In one sense, Lowell's peculiar sentence on Thoreau,—"his whole life was a search for the doctor,"—is not false. His doctor was health-giving Nature, which should bestow the tonic of purity, simplicity, and ideality to the congested civilization of the age, while she should bring, also, individual strength and elixir to his own body and soul. From his college days to the last years are occasional journal-notes of attacks of illness, passed by with light, apologetic mention, as was his wont on personal matters, yet indicating a proneness to bronchitis. As if in prescience of the future trials he wrote, after such an illness in 1841,—"Sickness should not be allowed to extend farther than the body. We need only to retreat farther within us to preserve uninterruptedly the continuity of serene hours to the end of our lives." In a letter to Mr. Blake in 1855, he refers to an illness of two or three months, followed by languor and inability to read or work. With characteristic optimism, he adds,—"However, there is one consolation in being sick and

that is the possibility that you may recover to a better state than you were ever in before." The following year he alludes to "ridiculous feebleness" and inability to take long tramps.

From this continued illness, called by him "two years' invalidity," he recovered sufficiently to take a later excursion to Cape Cod with Channing, and to the Maine Woods and White Mountains in 1857 and 1858. The excursion to the White Mountains, made with Edward Hoar, had the unusual luxuries of a horse and wagon, involving, in Thoreau's opinion, a loss of independence. It was on this trip, in exploring Tuckerman's Ravine, that Thoreau slipped and sprained his ankle and, at almost the same minute, found the arnica plant, *arnica mollis*, for which they had been searching as a botanical specimen. This opportune aid lessened the severity of the pain, but for five days Thoreau and Hoar, joined by two other friends, kept camp, while Thoreau entertained his friends with a lively recital of botanical facts, Indian legends and poetic selections. His health was not permanently reestablished, however, for the next year he refers to another illness. This year, after his father's death, he was closely confined at home and in indoor business; he once mentions in his journal, "some very irksome affairs on account of my family." His

last break from routine, after the strain and excitement of the John Brown affair, was in August, 1860, when he made his last trip to Monadnoc, encamping there five days with Channing who has described this excursion in "The Wanderer." Their letters record the severe rain-storm through which they journeyed to the summit, sheltered at last under a temporary "substantial house" of spruce roof, hewn by Thoreau. They did not reach this refuge, however, until they were as wet "as if we had stood in a hogshead of water." One cannot refrain from belief that such adventures, however exhilarating to Thoreau's spirits, were scarcely adapted to a physique liable to throat and lung disease.

It has been stated that on this Monadnoc trip he contracted his fatal cold but that is disproved by his own letters and the testimony of Concord friends. The latter declare that he had taken a contract for surveying and was determined to finish the work, though he had to stand in a swamp for hours. He never recovered from that exposure. In a letter to Mr. Ricketson, March 22, 1861, he wrote,—"I took a severe cold about the third of December, which at length resulted in a kind of bronchitis, so that I have been confined to the house ever since." In May of the same year, as he failed to gain strength,

the doctors urged a trip westward or to some warmer climate. With Horace Mann, Jr., a botanist friend, he started for Minnesota, there to remain three months. He returned, however, in a few weeks, with little benefit physically and a passionate longing for home-scenes. He took few notes and wrote few letters while on this journey, which he said he performed "in a very dead and alive manner," and his chief interest was in the letters from home. The only marked incidents were a few rare botanical and anatomical discoveries and a visit to the Sioux Indians at Redwood. Here he added to his personal knowledge of the Indians and their sentiments towards the white man, and incorporated some of these notes into his last literary work. From the time of his return, July 1861, until his death the following May, Thoreau experienced those alternates of hope and despair which accompany all bronchial diseases. His friend Edward Hoar, placed at his service a horse and carriage and, with Sophia or some friend, he took long drives while strength lasted. He made a brief visit to Mr. Ricketson in New Bedford in August, 1861; there he consented to sit for his last ambrotype from which Mr. Walton Ricketson has made his fine medallion.

If Thoreau showed a remarkable courage and in-

dependent nobility of character during the years of health, these qualities were yet more in evidence in his months of illness. His letters reveal almost constant cheerfulness and serenity. After reading these, it is easy to understand his sister's statement, —"During seventeen months never a murmur escaped him. I wish I could describe the wonderful simplicity and childlike trust with which he accepted every experience." He applied fully that philosophy which he had collated. Industrious to the last day of his life, he read many books, revised his manuscripts, and talked with family and friends. He was vitally interested in the beginnings of the war, declaring he was "sick for his country," and should never recover while the war lasted. He bore his debility and suffering like a hero but his attitude was more than mere resignation. There was the nobler element of contentment and faith. He was grateful for the years that he had enjoyed and knew that his time of revelation had come. He told Alcott,—"I leave the world without a regret." His serene faith never wavered. To Parker Pillsbury, who inquired concerning Thoreau's belief in the hereafter, he calmly and gently replied,—"My friend, one world at a time." To the well-meaning but bigoted Calvinist, who asked if he had made his peace with God, his answer was

as consistent,—"I have never quarreled with Him."

The home-life, always happy, was spiritualized during these last weeks. As he was courageous and peaceful, so he inspired the atmosphere about him. Into his nature crept a more tender manifestation of love. His mother told a friend, after Thoreau's death,—"Why, this room did not look like a sick-room. My son wanted flowers and pictures and books all around him; and he was always so cheerful and wished others to be so while about him." He insisted upon joining the family at meals even when his strength was nearly gone, because "it was more social." To them he would relate his strange dreams or unfold his treasures of knowledge and thought, as long as voice allowed. A pathetic little incident proclaimed his tender love for children. As he watched the village boys and girls, whom he had led to berry-pastures, or entertained with stories of his animal-friends, pass his home daily, he expressed to his sister a wish to see and talk with them, adding,—"I love them as well as if they were my own." Such was the stoic!

To the last he was visited by friends, old and young. It is noteworthy that any prejudice harbored by the townspeople against "the Walden hermit" or "the tax-evader" had wholly disap-

peared. His family relate the many evidences of kindness and deep affection, shown by neighbors and even strangers, to one whom they had learned to respect. To Mr. Calvin Greene, the Western friend of Thoreau, Miss Sophia narrated the following anecdote: "Some boys of the vicinity were in the habit of bringing game for him to eat, presenting it at the kitchen door, and then gently withdrawing, so as not to disturb the sick man. On one occasion he was told of it soon after their leaving, when he earnestly inquired, 'Why do you not invite them in? I want to thank them for so much that they are bringing me.' And then adding, thoughtfully, 'Well, I declare; I don't believe they are going to let me go after all.'" At another time, with half-humorous tenderness, he said,—"I should be ashamed to stay in this world after so much has been done for me! I could never repay my friends." His last letter, collated by Emerson and Sanborn, written jointly by Henry and Sophia, was to one of these strangers who, learning of Thoreau's illness, wrote with deep regret and regard. Very calm and courteous is the reply, containing the self-revelatory words,—"I suppose that I have not many months to live, but of course I know nothing about it. I may add that I am enjoying existence as much as ever, and regret

nothing." The opening sentence, also, bespeaks Thoreau's business habits and unfailing civility,—"I thank you for your very kind letter, which, ever since I received it, I have intended to answer before I died, however briefly."

Calmly he waited death, for which he had prepared himself all his life; nor was his a mock courage and bravado but a steadfast surety of faith in nature's laws and nature's God. Peacefully enjoying the fragrance of flowers, just sent in by an honored friend and neighbor, he passed from this life, May 6, 1862. With special appropriateness, his casket was hidden behind the wild flowers and forest growths that he had loved so well. His own poem, "Sic Vita," was read by Alcott and his eulogy spoken by Emerson, with broken, tender voice. Within his coffin Channing had placed some mottoes, two emphasizing Thoreau's ideals and faith:—"Gazed on the heavens for what he missed on earth." . . . "Hail to thee, O man, who art come from the transitory place to the imperishable." Burial, no less than death, lacked terrors for Thoreau. He had written, "For joy I could embrace the earth. I shall delight to be buried in it."

Does history afford another example of a brief life, lived so simply and steadfastly, left so willingly, and ended with such entire sublimity? So

serene and brave had been the long illness, and so peaceful and natural the passing of the life, that his sister could well write,—"I feel as if something very beautiful had happened,—not death."

Thoreau's Philosophy and Art of Life

CHAPTER VI

THOREAU'S PHILOSOPHY AND ART OF LIFE

A CHARACTER so unique as that of Thoreau always awakens current curiosity and an anecdotal reputation for the next generation. Nonconformity alone, however, will not win the serious, tenacious interest which has centred about this man during the last forty years and is vital to-day. Two reasons may be assigned for earnest study of his life and interpretation of its messages. In the first place, his strange, complex nature was more than individual; it represented the peculiar historical and literary influences of the mid-century upon a mind of strong, yet plastic, traits. Again, Thoreau not alone developed and applied a peculiar philosophy of life, but he so expressed this philosophy, in writings of signal, compulsive force, that he raised it into an art of living, an ideal and yet attainable expansion of the nobler nature of man, through pure and constant communion with the primal, creative forces of nature and truth.

Evidence of the wide-spread admiration, often akin to worship, for him as man and author, has

been cumulative during recent years. With authentic emphasis this public interest is revealed in a letter from Miss Sophia Thoreau to the woman whom her brother had loved in quiet, steadfast repression. This excerpt is now, by kind permission, first published:

"CONCORD, December 20th, 1868.

"Many are the friends who have risen up to do honor to the life and genius of our dear Henry. We have been wonderfully blessed and comforted by tokens of the most sincere appreciation and affection from utter strangers. At first when Henry left us, I felt that few knew him, but was consoled by the thought that the good God who made him and helped him to live so truthful, so pure and noble a life, would not let it be wasted. Now I am greatly surprised to learn the extent of his influence. I do believe it is rare in one's own generation to receive so much homage. Strangers have passed our house with bared heads in a spirit of reverence for the departed. Men and women have come from afar in summer and in winter, to gather a blossom or dried leaf as a memento from the site of the hut on the shore of Walden. One, whose name we never learned, sent ten dollars to mother and myself as a token of respect for Henry. It is really

pathetic the way in which regard for his memory has been manifested."

Thoreau lacked many external graces of mind and manner. He was seldom genial, seldom affable, his tenacity was often akin to obstinacy, he was too concise and frank to be always gracious. At the same time, such mere qualities of mien do not indicate lack of innate fineness or nobleness of character. All who knew him testified to the unfailing courtesy of the highest type, and his letters are further evidence of this trait. Without any foppish or exaggerated expressions of regard for women, he always gave dignified, grateful recognition of all claims of family or of friendship. His letters often show thoughtfulness and grace. In closing, he seldom omitted kind words of regard to the ladies of the family,—a slight yet significant token of the true gentleman that he was. As a friend, he was most loyal, with a dignified reserve that allowed no undue familiarity. The Scotch repression produced in him an attitude that was easily mistaken for coldness. He not alone shunned, but scorned, mere gossip or any society that lacked reverence and earnest truth. He appreciated wit and humor of a fine flavor but had proportionate impatience with the professional joker. Of such he wrote,—"One

complains that I do not take his jokes. I took them before he had done uttering them and went my way."

In his desire to be independent and simple in tastes and relations, he was not infrequently ill-poised and combative. He lacked that grace of mien and courteous attention to strangers which characterized Emerson, whose nature was more teachable and less intense than Thoreau's. When the latter recognized that his purpose was just, he did not quietly circumvent obstacles by the wayside but "split rocks" till he attained his end. Dignity and reserve seemed to him prime requisites of true manliness. Washington was to him "a proper Puritan hero." Thoreau admired his "erectness," his simplicity and, above all, his unswerving dignity and silence. On the other hand, few passages in his journal show greater personal annoyance than the recorded visits of three ultra-reformers, with their cant and familiar "greasy kindness." With reason, he resented their tone of intimacy towards him, their lack of "healthy reserve" and their boasted ability "to dive into his inmost depths." With genuine, chivalrous reverence for all women who performed loyal, sincere service to any work of progress, he could not refrain from a mild sarcasm upon the woman lecturer, who con-

fided to his pocket, for conveyance, her manuscript, carefully folded in her handkerchief, and so saturated with strong cologne that the odor long permeated his clothes.

His was the simple, dignified courtesy of a pure, earnest nature. Mr. Ricketson well described him as "the personification of civility." This friend appreciated the latent qualities of heart which Thoreau's later years especially revealed. Repressed in early manhood, these qualities opened to the world with less frankness than the traits of mind and soul. Among some letters from Mr. Ricketson to Miss Sophia Thoreau, confided to my use, is this thought,—"I do not think that Henry was fully revealed" (the word, developed, had been written, and erased in part), "and I had looked forward to the more genial years of advanced life, when the spiritual experiences of the soul should bring us nearer together. But a truer or better man I never knew, and his like I cannot hope to meet again." Thus, one may comprehend the deferential "bared-head" tribute paid to this life of purity and uprightness, to this character full of reserves of courage and inspiration.

It has been noted that Thoreau's environment was best adapted to develop and accentuate his strong, native elements. The racial traits of stur-

diness, industry, repression, truth, commingled with fineness, vivacity, ingenuity and nature-love, became amalgamated into a character singularly simple yet paradoxical, tinctured with the extreme philosophy and culture of the New England Transcendentalists. To question the sincerity of his life in any of its expressions, the Walden incident included, is to thrust a poisoned arrow at the very basis of his character. A school friend, Mr. Joseph Hosmer, wrote,—"He was the embodiment of perfect sincerity and truth; there was no gush or glamour in his make-up." With this sincerity was an unflinching bravery of soul which knew not faltering before discouragements, misinterpretations, grief, even death itself. Call this complacency, stoicism, if you will, yet forget not the delicate sensitiveness of humanity behind the quiet, steadfast endurance. It is a common quotation, as representative of his seeming misanthropy,—"Men rarely affect me as grand or beautiful, but I know that there is a sunrise and a sunset every day." The same critics, straining the meaning of the above sentence apart from its context, overlook the sentences so happily mingling nature and humanity in mutual dependence,—"Nature must be viewed humanely to be viewed at all, that is, her senses must be associated with human affections, such as

are associated with one's native place, for instance. She is most significant to a lover. If I have no friend, what is nature to me? She ceases to be morally significant." (Journal, June 30, 1852.) The man, shut in from the external world which had been so large a part of his life, was moved to tears and generous response by a tune of his boyhood days, played by a street musician. Such words and incidents express the latent tenderness of heart cherished and controlled, yet never crushed, coexistent with a complacency and quiet, steady growth, akin to that of nature and her laws.

As his life progressed, the lighter traits of French ancestry became less marked but they were never lost. Even in his later life, he had moods of merriment and pure relaxation. From his serious studies he would join the Emerson children in "playing Esquimaux" in their snow-cave, or would indulge in an occasional hilarious dance. Among Mr. Ricketson's published memorials are his graphic, descriptive verses on "Thoreau's Dance," a memory of an evening in the New Bedford home when the music of the young people awakened the vivacity and rhythm of the mature man to unique expression. The analogy of the versifier is graceful and dignified:

In *The Harvard Magazine* for May, 1862, Mr. S. S. Higginson recalled Thoreau's "elastic spirits" and sympathetic comradeship on long walks, resembling "a glorious boy" even in later life. It has been told that he would sometimes skate thirty miles in a day; such buoyant delight was echoed in the stanzas in "A Winter Walk";—

> "When Winter fringes every bough
> With his fantastic wreath,
> And puts the seal of silence now
> Upon the leaves beneath;
>
> "I gambol with my neighbor ice,
> And sympathizing quake;
> As each new crack darts in a trice,
> Across the gladsome lake."

It was this vivacity which gave such singular presence to Thoreau, for he lacked striking physique. In climbing mountains he seemed to on-lookers to float over fences in mid-air and to scale the very clouds with his long strides. His great muscular strength and mechanical skill brought him, from a stranger whom he met on a train, an offer, of a position in a factory, "stating conditions and wages, observing that I succeeded in shutting the window of a railroad car, when the other passengers had failed."

Thoreau, with natal traits of such diverse kinds, was an apt pupil for the impulse of philosophic thought. From the first, however, his mind was

interested in the empirical rather than the exigetical phases of past and present methods of philosophy. These tenets he studied and dissected but he collated such as appealed to his needs into an individual philosophy of life. Mr. Waldstein, in his analytic life of Ruskin, has said,—"Ruskin is a man who has dared to live his thoughts." The same words are applicable to Ruskin's antitype, Thoreau. Not alone did he formulate a philosophy to meet the exigencies of his manhood but he also adapted his life to the philosophic principles and educated his conscience, will, words and acts to embody and unfold these principles. Without difficulty one may trace the practical problems that confronted him and their gradual and consistent solution. When he entered college, with cravings for the best in literature but with limited financial resources, he met the problem of education, he recognized the defects of a college for full educement of all the faculties, and he solved the difficulty by an individual tenet. Believing that the true life must be nourished by the great thoughts and poetry of the past, he stored his mind with classic literature and such material on natural history as was then available; without defiance, but with calm judgment, he made prescribed texts subsidiary to these studies which would bring him the

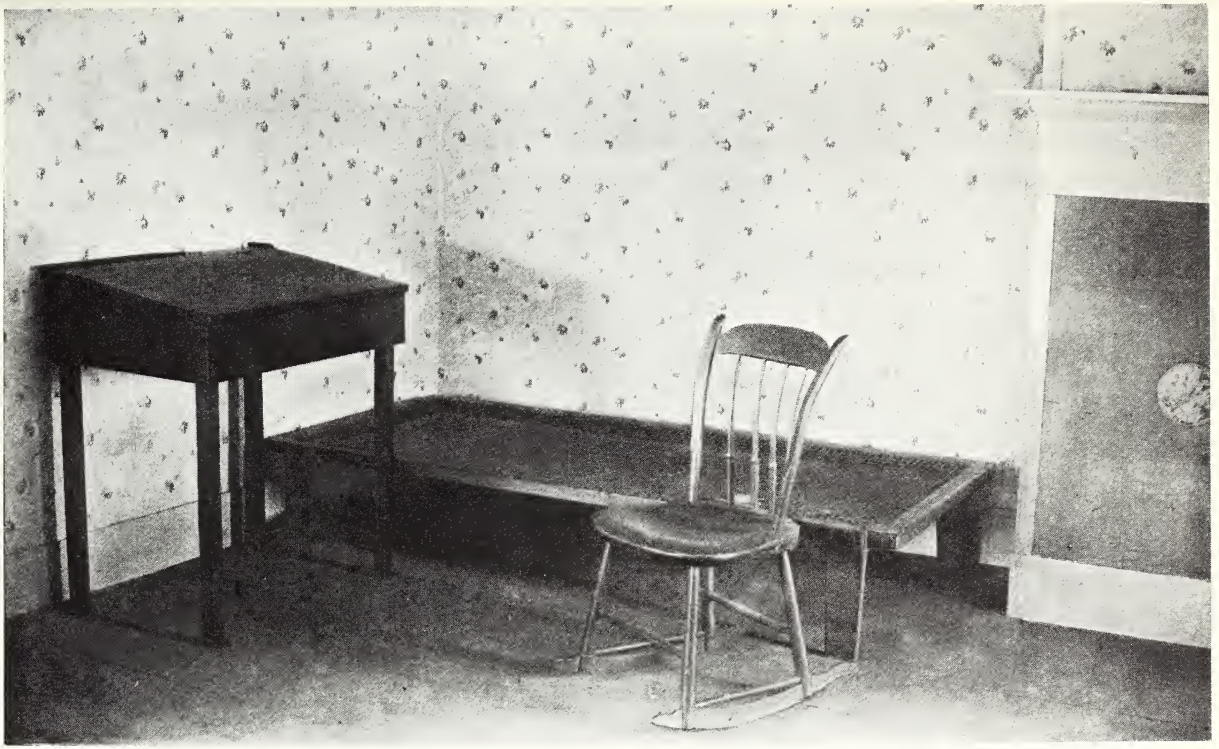
best education. In other words, he made himself forerunner of the elective system of the present. Again, he recognized and revolted from the sordid mercantile tendencies of the times; he tested and defied the narrow customs regarding conduct of life for a college-bred man. In nature and in poetry were his sources of inspiration, they should become his business, so he solved the problem of profession by becoming a naturalist and poet-philosopher. The problem of income required, as he understood the real purpose of life, only the primal creed of simplicity, the elimination of useless acquired tastes. To meet the *needs* of man exacted no excessive labor, only a healthy industry. He was puzzled by the question of government, its duplicity and injustice; he solved the dilemma by advocating individual conscience and refusal to support an unjust state which overturned its very foundation-stone of liberty.

One might easily expand these problems of experimental modernity and their solutions by Thoreau until he had framed for himself a program of life which seemed to embody the essential tenets of true philosophy. With this he would face life and death. Its dogmas he has expressed so forcefully that they are of vital importance to the present generation. Though sometimes his acts seemed incon-

sistent with his principles, the actual contradictions are few and, in many cases, a careful and honest study of the circumstances and motives reveals a sure, sincere accord with his basal creed. Apart, however, from the question of his practical experiences, his propositions and suggestions for modern living are of great interest and of increasing value to the thoughtful student of civilization. At Walden, as throughout life, Thoreau never advocated abstinence as regards the necessary wants of civilized life. He never urged selfish seclusion from human relations and services; rather he made his plea for temperate, careful adjustment of time and necessaries that each faculty might be duly nourished. His inheritance would forbid his acquiescence in any form of life that savored of the unclean or barbaric. Independent of fashions in dress, he was always neatly clad; indifferent to many courses of fancy viands, he was able to cook and serve plain foods with skill and taste; deploring foolish conceits and expense in architecture, he was ever careful to construct with regularity and grace. In short, as Mr. Salt has well said, he was "never a nullifier" but always "a simplifier of civilization." The deprivations due to poverty could be nullified by the doctrines of simplicity and contentment; the defects and shams of society were

not troublous to one who found unfailing companions in nature and a few trustful friends. Since leisure to think and "saunter" was a necessary condition for sanative life, he would make his wants so few that limited labor would supply them and leave him time for soul-culture.

Here is no assumption that these principles, as emphasized by Thoreau, were to any extent original. He was, in one sense, the most mimetic of men in his mental processes. He had assimilated much of the philosophy of Kant and his school, of Rousseau, of Coleridge, of Carlyle and of Emerson. The friendship of such men as Brownson, Alcott and Lane, contact and discussions with varied scholars, authors, and men of simple agrarian tastes,—all such influences gave him nucleus for many thoughts which his lucid and propulsive mind could amplify, combine, and apply. He would test these principles as creed for daily life. In him the practical sagacity and strong sense of proportion, which combined with his poetry and philosophy, saved him from the vague mysticism and pure ideality of Alcott, Ellery Channing and other friends among the Transcendentalists. He did, however, fully incorporate in his creed the basal aim of their teaching, —the substitution of inward light for outward law in the entire evolution and expression of his principles.



FURNITURE USED AT WALDEN

Thoreau was always "a simplifier of civilization"

Again, it is unjust to Thoreau to assert that his philosophy was only a spectacular presentation of Emerson's doctrines of individualism, already published in Nature, Self-Reliance, Friendship, and other essays. One could easily prepare a volume of considerable bulk from the strange parallelisms of thought found in the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, nor do Emerson's sentences always precede chronologically. That Thoreau was an imitator of Emerson will be denied, with proofs, in the next chapter. With similarity of mental outlook, devoted to the same forms of nature-communion and classic literature, environed by the same waves of philosophic teaching and local influence, the correlations and similitudes of thought are entirely consistent with absolute independence of character.

Unlike much effort of the time towards practical reform, Thoreau's plan was individualistic, as shown in the Walden incident. With Carlyle's respect for the hero-man versus the masses, he asks,—"When will the world learn that a million of men are of no importance compared with one man?" This underlying principle, which refuted altruism and utilitarianism, no less than communism, permeated his ideas on government, society, and religion. The individual, not the state, was his motto; self-expansion, not "doing good for others," his ideal. As

regards nature, man is "an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of nature, rather than a member of society." When the question of opposition to slavery arose, his preaching was that his countrymen were *men* first, and *Americans* afterwards. Thus, through the imagery of the pure water-lily, "partner to no Missouri compromise," he urged individual "purity and courage which are immortal."

This individualistic philosophy, with its corollary of self-improvement, has given a narrow, seemingly selfish tone to many of his words. The idea, however, must be considered in its entirety and logical sequence, to be justly understood. His own life and his most earnest words proclaim that self-expansion should prove preparatory to the highest service for mankind and society in generic form. The latter should be constructed to assist, not to retard, the noblest development of each man and woman. At present the individual is compelled to suppress his nature-given faculties that he may conform to the usages of society. Robert Louis Stevenson, though he failed to understand many of Thoreau's traits, because he accepted some false guides, said forcefully of the Walden seclusion and Thoreau's later life,—"The secret of his retirement lies not in misanthropy, of which he had no tincture, but part in his engrossing design of self-improvement

and part, in the real deficiencies of social intercourse." Thoreau once explained his isolation as "a desire to soar" and, in the process, he found his companions becoming rapidly less. In exploiting and applying his philosophy of self-culture, he was often indifferent to the world and its real merits, he often showed a lack of true altruism. One must, however, distinguish carefully in both his teaching and its exposition. Indifferent, even defiant, to petty rules and conventions, which preclude the natural cultivation of all faculties, he is emphatically desirous that life, when expanded in the individual, should share its fruitage with mankind. After expansion, comes unfolding and expression. In one of his personal explanations, he wrote;—"I would fain communicate the wealth of my life to men, would really give them what is most precious in my gift. . . . I will sift the sunbeams for the public good. I know no riches I would keep back." Again, after a longing for a life of seclusion with nature, he rebuked such desire and emphasized rather the need of "dropping the plummet where you are," of present duty and faithfulness; thus, will one live a "purer, a more thoughtful and laborious life, more true to your friends and neighbors, more noble and magnanimous, and that will be better than a wild walk."

Thoreau had trifling patience with showy charity or with long-faced, cantish reformers. Distinguishing between philanthropy, in its restricted sense, and true service to humanity in the broad way, he wrote,—"I would not subtract anything from the praise that is due to philanthropy, but merely demand justice for all who by their lives and works are a blessing to mankind." Again, in characteristic form, is his creed of unpretentious service,—"Rescue the drowning and tie your shoe-strings." In his exposition of such principles in real life, he was ever ready with loving service. Among examples is the story of his devotion to a fugitive slave who rested for a day at the Thoreau home, probably the incident mentioned in his journal, for October 1, 1851. A friend, who was then a visitor in the family, relates Thoreau's tender care for the slave, his personal attentions to his food and rest, even bathing the poor, tired feet and, as a crowning self-abnegation, renouncing his afternoon walk to stand guard over the fugitive all day. In the historical collection at Concord, in the Thoreau room, stands a crude and striking piece of china. It is one of those unique statues of "Uncle Tom" holding Eva upon his knee; one of many odd devices of picture and cast brought into temporary vogue by the popularity of Mrs. Stowe's novel.

Mr. Tolman, the custodian of the treasure-house, who was once resident in the Thoreau house, relates that this memento was bought for Thoreau by this slave whom he had so lovingly tended. Returning from Canada to Boston, the negro spent his last penny for the gift, and walked from Boston to Concord to give it to his friend. Thoreau was deeply appreciative of the gratitude and always treasured the gift and its association.

Another anecdote recently told in print indicated his readiness to aid any person in real need. Walking with a friend in a street near the station, he saw a poor woman with a heavy child in her arms, hurrying to reach the train that was about to depart. Without a moment's hesitation, Thoreau jumped the intervening fence, took the child from the tired mother, and striding forward, persuaded, —or compelled,—the engineer to wait until the woman could arrive. All the strenuous words and acts of his later years in behalf of John Brown and freedom, testify to his zeal in service for a large cause.

In Thoreau's philosophy of self-development as preparatory for service, certain basal tenets are involved. Preeminent are the coeval necessities of industry and leisure. Emerson said of him,—"A very industrious man, and setting, like all highly-

organized men, a high value on his time, he seemed the only man of leisure in the town, always ready for any excursion that promised well, or for conversation prolonged into late hours." Again, Channing bore testimony to the ultimate end of Thoreau's life as "work." In modern life we need to ponder well Thoreau's thoughts on these two necessities for true growth. If leisure, the essential for real expansion of mind and soul, is fast becoming obsolete in this "nation in a hurry," so work, in Thoreau's use of the term, is being supplemented by nervous competition. Work as a healthful, joyous expression of life is allied to poetry. Forty years ago he drew sharp antitheses between this true industry and the peace-destroying, soul-sapping excitements of commercialism. His readers, perforce, wonder what polemics he would have uttered against the tyrannous, nervous methods of current life. Among the most spicy passages in "Walden" is a tirade against such kind of activity, which he calls "Saint Vitus's Dance." Against the threatening national tendency to "rush," now a sad, pervasive symptom in all places, he wrote with warning,—"Men say that a stitch in time saves nine, and so they take a thousand stitches to-day to save nine to-morrow."

Like Ruskin and his pupil, William Morris, Thoreau

always accentuated the poetic relation between the workman and his work. In "A Week" he wrote with poetic thought,—"Behind every man's busyness there should be a level of undisturbed serenity and industry, as within the reef encircling a coral isle there is always an expanse of still water, where the depositions are going on which will finally raise it above the surface." With despair, to-day, one recalls his maxim,—"Do not hire a man who does your work for money, but him who does it for love and pay him well." Work to him, as to Carlyle, was a religion. It must be performed faithfully, however slight; "drive a nail home and clinch it so faithfully that you can wake up in the night and think of your work with satisfaction." Joy and faithfulness always coalesced in his work. He took pride in having the timbers of the Walden lodge well mortised and tenoned. The famous little study which Alcott tried to construct for Emerson, in the latter's garden, was a source of annoyed amusement to Thoreau because of its lack of perspective and the impractical upward curve of the eaves and moss-lined roof. It soon merited the name, "The Ruin," given to it by Madam Emerson. We are told that Thoreau drove the nails, and their security was in sharp contrast with the fairy-like structure of the roof.

As workman and writer he was always methodical and intense. He measured the height of the toadstool and the Highland Lighthouse. He always worked with concentration, yet never with such haste as to prevent the full enjoyment of the work. He applied his own advice to keep all the faculties in repose save the one in use. We hear much to-day of the interrelations of brain and manual work and the best means of associating both with nature. Thoreau in America, as Ruskin and Jefferies in England, early advocated this alliance of outdoor tasks and sanative studies. In his bean-field at Walden, on his botanical excursions, in surveying and fence-building, in writing and studying, he met the requisite demands of both work and leisure. Like many salient dogmas of the best creeds, this combination is not always possible; Thoreau's independent circumstances enabled him to appropriate more leisure than others could afford. The doctrine, however, is true and deserves all the emulation which environment can be forced to yield.

Industry and leisure, if rightly related in kind and measure, will develop contentment and cheer, the ultimate end in all philosophy of experimental trend. Thoreau suggests a vital and universal truth when he says of himself, that "enthusiasm

in youth" became "temperament" in manhood. At Walden his enthusiasm was symbolized by chanticleer, to "wake his neighbors up." This gleeful enjoyment of nature and life found more serene, yet no less emphatic, statements in the temperamental writings of more mature years. "Life is not for complaint but for satisfaction." . . . "Why should we not meet, not always as dyspeptics, to tell our bad dreams, but sometimes as eupeptics, to congratulate each other on the ever-glorious morning." Thoreau realized that to maintain the equable division of work and leisure, to attain contentment and cheer, there must be readjustment of the standards of civilization. In other words, he based his philosophy on the transcendental doctrine of the simplification of life. In looking at society, he found commercialism and anxiety, sham and artifice, injustice and suffering, and these contending armies seemed called into battle by the complex demands of modern life. To "reduce life to its lowest terms," to separate the essential from the artificial, to satisfy the natural cravings of senses, brain, and heart, and preclude the merely acquired tastes from becoming tyrannous,—such formed the pivotal point of his creed. "Probe the earth and see where your main roots run." Walden tested and proved the doctrine

of simplicity to the satisfaction of Thoreau,—and his later life, though it brought somewhat broader opportunities and enticements to complex life, did not swerve him from his fixed aim. What began as a philosophic ideal, became an art of living. "My greatest skill has been to want but little." Like Ruskin, he waged continual warfare upon the common desire "to get on in the world," substituting the mere "trappings of life" for the true joy of living.

Two thoughts are significant in connection with Thoreau's doctrine of simplification of life. One has already been emphasized,—his careful distinction between savagery and civilization. The superfluities of modern habits, never the real necessities of pure, uplifting life, represented his fractions to be eliminated. He always admired such accessories of modern life and invention as contributed to the aid and development of man. His thoughts often contemplated with pleasure the great medium of commerce by ships or railways. He would have welcomed the modern devices for agriculture, unknown in his day, which minimize the farmer's drudgery and lessen his hours of labor. Merely acquired tastes, from continued indulgence, seem to us necessities; such he would reduce, that living might become more easeful and restful. From the

midst of our crowded life to-day, multiform in acquired tastes since the days of Thoreau, we go away for a few weeks of simple, direct contact with nature in her wildness and her peace. We supply only *needs;* we rejoice in temporary non-conformity; we read Thoreau and his successors in nature-communion; we resolve to follow his plan for simplification, "instead of three meals a day if it be necessary, eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion." On return, we make one or two spasmodic efforts to simplify but we lose courage at some neighbor's amaze and sarcasm. Though the brief experience has shown us that Thoreau found the true secret of growth for mind and soul, that he knew how to win contentment, yet we abandon his ideas again and fall into "this chopping sea of civilized life." We enter again with weak, dejected souls the competition, and "rush" from hour to hour, breathlessly demanding the "latest edition" and feeling a momentary satisfaction when we get "the six o'clock latest" four hours before it is due. At such times, one realizes with new force the manliness and soul-courage of Thoreau who "dared to live his thoughts."

In the second place, this creed of simplification did not imply resignation. Recall his own words

in "Walden";—"I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary." Wealth and poverty are entirely relative concepts. The omission of the artificial seemed to him merely a reasonable and advantageous reform which brought contentment, not resignation. A critic has well said,—"Thoreau represents himself as an epicure rather than an ascetic." He weighed the wealth-acquiring habit against the commensurate deprivations of freedom and leisure, time to enjoy nature and books, and to him the student, supplying physical wants and cultivating mind and soul, seemed the true man of wealth. He was to be envied,—perhaps he is,—by his brother plodding among the flesh-pots of Egypt. His text was akin to the couplet of Young;

> "Who lives to nature rarely can be poor;
> Who lives to fancy never can be rich."

Emerson said of Thoreau,—"He knew how to be poor without the least hint of squalor or inelegance." Thoreau would, indeed, combat that term, "poor"; his philosophy had taught him that "a man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone."

If simplicity, sincerity, leisure, industry, content-

ment, were at the roots of his philosophy, its branches were truth, purity, justice and faith. It would be tautologic to example these traits in Thoreau's life. They were its firm, increasing elements, they became the motors of steadfast, noble acts and words. Truth was the beacon of his character, and its full glare he turned upon his ideals, his deeds and his faith. Like all men of poetic nature, he often felt that he failed to attain his most desired aspirations. In his journals, he reiterates his failures; in answer to the possible charge of egotism in thought, though it was often present in manner, he confesses a consciousness of his own unworthiness and declares that none can esteem him so faulty as does his own conscience. Though dogmatic in announcing the details of his principles for conduct, he was always humble in comments on his ideals and their application;—"Be resolutely and faithfully what you are, be humbly what you aspire to be."

Literature cannot show example of a man of greater purity of thought and deed than was Thoreau. He recognized in nature the constant query, —"Are you virtuous? Then you may behold me." Any lapse from absolute cleanliness of thought or word met his instant, vehement denunciation, any coarseness or vulgarity he could never endure. His

religion was of the intellect and the soul rather than of the emotions, except where his poetic sense made appeal. Rejecting narrow, sectarian formulas, satirizing the churches of his day as hospitals for sick souls, he was from first to last a Deist and a Pantheist. As his studies of various religions increased he became, like Emerson and many others of that age, broadly religious, always emphasizing the beauties and morality of the world's religions. Never did he lose faith in one Power, in Jesus, and in immortality. Reference to his Pantheism recalls Thoreau's difference with Lowell which, doubtless, affected the tone of the latter's essay in "My Study Windows." While Lowell was editor of *The Atlantic*, Thoreau sent to the magazine his papers on "Chesuncook," later a part of "The Maine Woods." In a sentence descriptive of a lofty pine the author said, partly in pantheistic fervor, partly in that humorous hyperbole which was his wont,—"It is as immortal as I am, and perchance will go to as high a heaven, there to tower above me still." Lowell, fearful of the result of such doctrine upon some of his readers, suppressed this portion of the paragraph, without consulting Thoreau. Such a deed was so hateful to the principles of freedom and justice in the author's nature that he recalled the rest of the essays. He

referred to the matter in his journal and letters as "a liberty for which the gold of California could not requite me."

With such independence and self-reliance, that sometimes savored of hauteur, with his broad, scholarly, religious speculations, he showed throughout life a childlike faith as perfect as that of Browning or Whittier. In his first book is included the poem of trust, deemed worthy a place in Mr. Stedman's Anthology, with its simple expression of faith,—

> "I will not doubt the love untold,
> Which not my worth or want hath bought;
> Which wooed me young and wooes me old,
> And to this evening hath me brought."

In a letter to Mr. Blake in 1848 are the words,—"I know that another is who knows more than I, who takes an interest in me, whose creature and yet whose kindred in one sense am I. I know that things work well. I have heard no bad news." Despite the shams and wrongs of society, despite the affronts to God and man from daily evil, there is ever a sure optimism in Thoreau's teachings. "Walden" closes with an outburst of joyful promise,—"Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star."

Thoreau's philosophy, lived and tested as an art, was fitted to his sickness and to his health, and endured triumphant to the end. In the primeval life at Walden, in the full vigor of mountain excursion, in the study, in the lecture-hall, in the sick-room, he was able to live his ideas and to fulfil his creed. He had maintained that life was a battle, "on a bed of sickness or in the tented field." He had urged courage to the very end, for "despair and postponement are cowardice and defeat." With a temperament at once fine and strong, with a dauntless will trained by years of simple, courageous life, he lived his philosophy to the last day of his life. His simple tastes, his sincere words, his constant industry, his needful leisure, his unswerving contentment and joy, his perfect faith in the future,—these tenets were maintained, even exampled, to the finish of the brave life. And this is the man that Stevenson calls a "Skulker"!

While all must recognize the merits and practical consistency of Thoreau's philosophy, it is impossible to defend it from the charges of narrowness and prejudice. Like Carlyle, he refused to bring all matters within his focus for a clear, sure vision. He exaggerated the defects, even as he minimized the benefits of society. He had lofty ideals of friendship and many devoted friends but for society

as a unit he had little sympathy and much unjust criticism. He was not misanthropic but rather ultra-individualistic. Against newspapers as exponents of trivialities, of the sensational and the superficial, he was denunciatory, often fractious. He queried if it were wise for him to read even one newspaper a week; what anathemas would he have breathed against this era of sensational journalism and its supremacy? For his own self-improvement he deemed further contact with the world, through social clubs or travel, not alone unwise but deleterious. He did not assume, however, that such complete isolation would be a universal benefit. In truth, he compared himself to a man whose temperament could not endure much wine, so his nature found much society a distraction, even an injury. He reiterates, however,—"But I say that I have no scheme about it,—no designs on man at all."

With that inexplicable pleasure in futile speculations, that characterizes some minds, the question has been raised regarding the probable effects of travel and more society upon Thoreau's nature. If he had survived the war, would he have maintained the interest in national affairs which he disclosed as life was ending? Would not contact with broader and more varied minds have changed his eccentricities into strong, yet gracious, influences? Such

questions are of no avail. Personalities, when changed by individual imaginations or desires, lose their identity; they must be considered as they actually existed. Poe, with poise and restraint, would not have been the visionary poet of "Ulalume" and "The Raven." De Quincey, unallured by drugs and dreams, would not have been the author of the matchless "Confessions." Abraham Lincoln, with broad refinement, would no longer be the same unique, paradoxical, intrepid statesman. Thoreau, under widening influences and distractions, would have lost force and depth. Thoreau's philosophy, his life, his writings, are of lasting interest and value because they are so intensive, so focalized, yet reflective of the passing phases of the mental period in which he lived, and prophetic of the threatening dangers revealed to his soul in its seclusion and serenity. Mr. Burroughs has said,— "An extreme product of civilization and of modern culture, he was yet as untouched by the worldly and commercial spirit of his age and country as any red man that ever haunted the shores of his native stream." Such analogous comment is misleading. Thoreau was not "*untouched*" by these tendencies but he was, more truly, *untainted* by them. He knew well the elements which corrupt and degrade society, he felt their effect at times with deep re-

gret, but he became master of circumstances, and he made himself exempt from their control.

As if in answer to the suggested effect of broadening his sympathies, is the significant passage in the journal for November 12, 1853, now included in "Autumn":—"I cannot but regard it as a kindness in those who have had the steering of me, that by want of pecuniary wealth, I have been nailed down to this native region so long and so steadily, and made to study and love this spot of earth more and more. What would signify in comparison a thin and diffused love and knowledge of the whole earth instead, got by wandering? Wealth will not buy a man a home in nature."

By study, assimilation, and actual experiment, Thoreau framed an individual philosophy. This he adopted and exampled in a life, in the main, consistent and happy. For such reasons, he can speak as a seer to these later decades. He foretold the necessary conditions, the foundation-stones of a moral and uplifting community,—simplicity, integrity, work, and contentment. He prophesied the decadence of fibres of intellect and soul in a civilization which becomes careless of the higher nature, which becomes absorbed in materialism, luxuries, and artificial society. To guard against such temptations for himself and mankind, he found sanative

blessings in joyful industry, nature-comradeship, simple tastes, and spiritual refreshment and serenity. Many of the conditions of contemporaneous life evidence the sure vision and the moral insight of this philosopher. In retrospect, as well as in prophecy, we can recognize his practical wisdom, we can still gain recuperation and inspiration in his messages, that seem to have added pertinence and potency in these later decades, thrilling with the spirit of reform for the sociological and industrial evils that confront this new century.

Thoreau and His Friends

CHAPTER VII

THOREAU AND HIS FRIENDS

ARISTOTLE was one of Thoreau's favorite authors; it would seem as if the New England poet-philosopher applied in his life the definition of friendship given by the Greek sage,—"One soul abiding in two bodies." The affinity demanded by Thoreau is seldom approximated in the most perfect loyalty of friends. In the essay, first published in "A Week," are many rhapsodic suggestions akin to Emerson's transcendental ideas upon the same theme of friendship. Thoreau's aspiration, which became virtually an exaction, was that the true friend, "a pure, divine affinity," should be so closely in touch with his friends, in their thoughts especially, that he should treat them "not as what they were, but as what they aspired to be." In turn, the true friend will be content with this recognition of his potential nobleness and will ask no other boon. He will strive daily to merit such apotheosis,—"Friends should live not in harmony but in melody."

It has been suggested, with some plausibility,

that Thoreau's romantic and poetic ideas on friendship were closely linked with his early repressed love. Moreover, his insistence on the bond of relation, which needs no explanations, was accordant with his peculiar reticence and independence, no less than his absolute sincerity. There are sentences, especially in his early writings, vibrant with memory of the tender heart-love between man and woman, while some of his later words on friendship seem iterations of this deep, unsatisfied affection. His thoughts on "Love and Chastity" are unsurpassed in beauty of concept and form;—"A hero's love is as delicate as a maiden's. . . . We should not surrender ourselves heartily to any while we are conscious that another is more deserving of our love." Perchance that subtle sentence explains Thoreau's refusal to entertain thoughts of marriage, though his friends assure us that two women were quite willing, even anxious, to link their lives with his. In one letter to Emerson he makes a quiet, firm reference to such fact and his immediate decision. ("Familiar Letters," p. 116.)

His few references to love between the sexes, however, are submerged beneath the more generic love of friends, without which our life is "like coke and ashes." Thoreau's lofty aspirations were, of necessity, often unfulfilled, as his letters and

journals indicate. Explanations and testimonies seemed to him an insult to friendship. He acknowledges this inability on his own part to resort to confessions and guarantees, a reserve due not to pride, he says, but to his assured faith that the true friends will understand without explanations, which merely cheapen a loving relationship. His friend's atmosphere must be fully in accord with his own or "it is no use to stay." The language of friendship must be, not in words, but in latent, constant affinity.

In spite of these somewhat nebulous visions of the poet, Thoreau in daily life, was one of the most generous, helpful friends. Channing said with truth,—"He was at the mercy of no caprice; of a reliable will and uncompromising sternness in his moral nature, he carried the same qualities into his relations with others, and gave them the best he had, without stint." His real value as a friend, as too often is the case, received the first, full recognition in his obituary notices. He had tried to apply his own ideals in his friendships; he had loved freely, unchangingly, as he loved God, "with no more danger that our love will be unrequited or ill-bestowed." In later life, however, he grieved over some criticisms and misunderstandings on the part of some earlier friends. Frequent references

regret that he is regarded as "cold" and too reserved. To him such criticism seemed merely a divergence of friendship, a lack of true, warm *entente*. No reader can fail to note the tone of gentle sadness which Thoreau displayed when commenting on such misinterpretation of his steadfast loyalty, which he could not stoop to repeat in mere words. With a tender patience, he wrote of his death,—"And then I think of those amongst men who will know that I love them, though I tell them not."

Perhaps such persistence in reserve and aspirations indicated, to a surface reader, a supersensitive, impractical, even obstinate, temperament. Granting the existence of some natal qualities of this sort, these lofty ideals were also the expression of the poet and the moral reformer. They resulted from his acceptance of many transcendental beliefs, from his appeal to the intuitive, spiritual nature. Among significant notes that illumine this theme is the journal paragraph, in "Winter," for December 12, 1851;—"In regard to my friends, I feel that I know and have communion with a finer and subtler part of themselves which does not put me off when they put me off, which is not cold to me when they are cold, not till I am cold. I hold by a deeper and stronger tie than absence can sunder." Again, in

March, 1856, he refers to two friends who failed to meet his tests of friendship, one who offered friendship "on such terms that I could not accept it without a sense of degradation," who sought to patronize him; the other, through obtuseness, "did not recognize a fact which the dignity of friendship would by no means allow me to descend so far as to speak of, and yet the inevitable effect of that ignorance was to hold us apart forever." Without any offensive *details intime*, how fully these comments reveal the dignity and lofty uprightness, the delicacy and nobleness of Thoreau's heart and soul!

To a casual thinker, it might seem as if a man who had such cerulean ideals for friendship, who mingled a supersensitiveness and severity in his demands, would find few practical friends who could approximate his standards. On the contrary, Thoreau was a friend, deeply loved and eagerly sought by men and women of diverse natures. With all his ideal demands, he mingled a rare charity for actual words and acts; he was personally humble and full of practical aid. He was ready to appreciate the services of his friends, capable of understanding their generous motives, even better than their impulsive acts, he was a cheerful, intellectual comrade, though always disparaging his own merits in idealizing the qualities of his friends.

He once declared that his distinction among his friends must be that "of the greatest bore they ever had." Among some passages from letters to his Western correspondent, Mr. Greene, is a comment, called forth by an expressed desire to see Thoreau, in which he derides himself as "the stuttering, blundering, clodhopper that I am, not worth a visit."

While he was a wise and entertaining comrade and a practical helper in any possible way for his friends, he was especially venerated by some as a father-confessor and a spiritual guide. Mr. Emerson, in his funeral eulogy, referred to the worship given Thoreau by those who recognized his qualities of soul as well as brain; his letters and those of his sister testify to the many requests for advice, both on practical and moral themes, during his later life, and the wide-spread appeal to him for inspiration and courageous incentive. While always ready to aid where his words or acts could do real service, he disliked any semblance of dogmatism, he never posed as a preacher or prophet, and in many cases answered the requests for advice by a dignified, courteous refusal, and an adjuration to the seeker to consult his own higher nature and educate his own conscience to become his guide. Among his friends, none has more fittingly commemorated his

With great respect and
R. W. Emerson

helpful traits, his true services to friendship, than Channing, in the personal lines:—

> "Thus Henry lived,
> Considerate to his kind. His love bestowed
> Was not a gift in fractions, half-way done;
> But with some mellow goodness like a sun,
> He shone o'er mortal thoughts and taught their buds
> To blossom early, thence ripe fruit and seed.
> Forbearing too oft counsel, yet with blows
> By pleasing reason urged he touched their thought
> As with a mild surprise, and they were good,
> Even as if they knew not whence that motive came,
> Nor yet suspected that from Henry's heart—
> His warm, confiding heart,—the impulse flowed."

At mention of Thoreau's friends, the memory at once reverts to Emerson, as the first and most illustrious friend of Thoreau's manhood. The influence of that friendship and their mutual services will always be mooted subjects. Some earlier critics, like Lowell, or those persuaded by his words, regarded Thoreau as Emerson's progeny,—"a pistillate plant" of his pruning. Others, with strained effect, explain the character of Donatello as the awakening of Thoreau's soul, under the influence of Emerson, as witnessed and recorded by Hawthorne. On the other hand, there are critics, like Dr. Japp, who deplore the temporary influence of Emerson as deleterious to Thoreau's true development as poet. No one can question the stimulative effect, emotionally and mentally, of Thoreau's early friend-

ship with Emerson and residence in his home. The time is past, however, to accept the theory that his genius was reflected light from Emerson or that his fame has been due to the association of the two names.

By those who would thus regard Thoreau as imitator of Emerson, much stress was laid upon the resemblances in manner and voice, and this was construed as conscious or unconscious expression of the dominant influence of Emerson upon his younger friend. The words of Rev. David Haskins, a college classmate of Thoreau and a cousin of Emerson, have been widely quoted;—"Not long after I happened to meet Thoreau in Mr. Emerson's study at Concord—the first time we had come together since leaving college. I was quite startled by the transformation that had taken place in him. His short figure and general cast of countenance were of course unchanged; but in his manners, in the tones of his voice, in his mode of expression, even in the hesitations and pauses of his speech, he had become the counterpart of Mr. Emerson." Though such statement is extreme, according to the testimony of many Concord friends, there did exist strange resemblances of manner as well as of mind, but they were largely coincidal. To both, nature had given musical, mel-

low voices, and these had been further likened by the subtle effect of companionship. A Concord friend of both Emerson and Thoreau recently said to me,—"One might as well assert that Thoreau's nose was an imitation of Emerson's," for both had the aquiline Roman features. Unconsciously, Thoreau confided to his journal an incident which throws light upon this resemblance, a passage that has not been quoted in this connection. In the brief account of his part, in 1859, in speeding one of John Brown's accomplices from Concord to Canada, while they were driving to Acton for a train, he recounts the fugitive's urgent request to find Emerson, that he might discuss some plans with him. So eager was the fanatic to gain his end that he once jumped from the carriage but was speedily reinstated by Thoreau who drove quickly forward. Recognizing that the man was partly insane, Thoreau records, "At length when I made a certain remark, he said, 'I don't know but you are Mr. Emerson; are you? You look somewhat like him.' . . . He said this as much as two or three times." ("Autumn," pp. 381–2.) Thus, in later as in earlier years, the similarity of features was noticed, and the coincidences of thought have been themes for wonder, from their discovery by Helen Thoreau to the present day.

Clearly, Emerson at no time regarded Thoreau as his imitator or unconscious reflector. He always emphasized the peculiar and original ability of his friend. If the maturity of Thoreau's life brought disappointment to Emerson, it never changed his belief in the possibilities of mind and literary power in the younger man. When at the request of Sophia Thoreau, Emerson read her brother's journals, the year after the death of their owner, he recorded, not in generous adulation, but in his own private journal, the words on Thoreau;—"In reading him, I find the same thoughts, the same spirit that is in me, but he takes a step beyond, and illustrates by excellent images that which I should have conveyed in a sleepy generalization. 'Tis as if I went into a gymnasium and saw youths leap, and climb, and swing, with a force unapproachable, though their feats were only continuations of my initial grapplings and jumps." Here is hint of the similitude and difference in the two minds, born and trained under the same intellectual influences. Emerson's trend was towards generic, soul-uplifting thoughts; Thoreau's towards the specific and illustrative, yet no less lofty.

A critic has said that during Thoreau's later life his relations with Emerson became "Roman and austere." These are extreme terms to apply to a

friendship which never lost the bases of mutual respect and love but which suffered certain strains of difference in opinion, as the years passed. Emerson was deeply, vitally interested in Thoreau's future and anticipated great results for him and the world. Writing to a friend of Carlyle's expected visit to America about 1840, Emerson mentioned that he should introduce Thoreau as "the man of Concord." Recognizing the masterly powers of intellect and will in Thoreau, his friend prophesied for him leadership in literary and state affairs. In this forecast he had failed to give sufficient weight to certain marked limitations and unswerving tenets in Thoreau's character. Emerson possessed a remarkable poise and serene wisdom. He was victim of no impulses and intense passions. In philosophical and practical ideas alike, he was foresighted and calm. He never allowed his devotion to principle and reform to commit him to words or acts of extreme radicalism. When he left the church over which he ministered, because he could not accept the need of the eucharist, he made no bombastic scene. In his essays he uttered some startling and misty iconoclasms of thought and aim, but when he read these words or discussed his principles, he was always controlled, always tolerant of the views of others. In brief, he always

exercised a wise, gracious caution and patience, qualities which added to the paramount influence of his presence. Full of the desire for reform of individual life and general society, until the critical decade of the wide-spread anti-slavery movement, he never lent his name nor influence to any rabid or extreme methods. He could not understand that intense devotion to ideas of abstract government which brought Thoreau to jail for non-payment of taxes. He regretted, also, the tenacious refusal of his friend to accept opportunities for travel and progression in worldly ways. As he once hinted, it was a grief to him that a man, fitted to be a leader of men in thought and action, should be content to become merely "a leader of huckle-berry parties of young people." In the Concord circle of his day, and in the wider world of public opinion since, Emerson, with his balanced judgment, his broad and cautious respect for custom and affairs of state, his serene yet no less magnetic aspirations for a gradual, sure adjustment of conditions that would effect a more simple, sincere civilization, has gained greater honor than his more radical pupil-friend, Thoreau. The latter, as Emerson recognized in his comments on the journal already quoted, carried to extreme issues many of the seething, perplexing ideals of the day,

though saved from association with the radical communities by his individualism.

As life advanced, the divergencies in mind between Emerson and Thoreau became more marked because of their temperamental traits. Nature had given to Emerson adroitness and keenness, mollified by calm, kindly judgment. Thoreau, on the contrary, despite his attained serenity of soul, was sometimes moved by wrong and injustice to Carlylean indignation. While always courteous in its highest sense, Thoreau's mental attitude was, at times, combative and irascible. To Emerson's sunny soul, he seemed, occasionally, "with difficulty, sweet." His wit was sometimes acrid in arguments, while his reserve and refusal to explain led to many transitory misunderstandings. If the relations between Emerson and Thoreau in later life were less intimate, they were no less friendly. Both formed other acquaintances with whom affinity and propinquity fostered greater intimacy. Thoreau was conscious of Emerson's disappointment and criticism, he felt both keenly, though he gave no specific expression, but he became more reserved outwardly to hide the inward sensitiveness. Moreover, reserve was not the exclusive attribute of Thoreau. Many of Emerson's friends complained of inability to reach his inner self. In

answer to such a charge from Margaret Fuller, Emerson acknowledged such barriers to any intimacy between himself and others and called himself "an unrelated person." Henry James, Senior, openly declared that he could not probe the misty, calm reserve of Emerson, "who kept one at such arm's length, tasting him and sipping him and trying him."

It is not strange that Emerson truly believed that Thoreau's desire was to become a stoic. He did not know, until after Thoreau's death, many of the dormant, submerged evidences of tender heart-love. His funeral address, so widely read and quoted, revealed his deep admiration for his friend, but it also showed that, doubtless unwittingly, he had lost sight of some of the nobler and gentler qualities of Thoreau's nature. In a reminiscent sketch by Mrs. Rebecca Harding Davis, entitled "A Little Gossip," in *Scribner's Magazine* for November, 1900, she emphasizes Emerson's delight in the study of men and women, as a scientist would study specimens. This acute probing extended even to his friends and, as the years caused lapse of full memory, occasioned some comments of seeming disloyalty. To Mrs. Davis, a few years after Thoreau's death, he said;—"Henry often reminded me of an animal in human form. He had

the eye of a bird, the scent of a dog, the most acute, delicate intelligence. But no soul. No, Henry could not have had a human soul." While Emerson, in his inner truth, did not mean this analysis as it may sound to a casual reader, one cannot refrain from regret that such a half-truth should have been uttered and printed. Would Thoreau ever have said such enigmatical words of a friend? Such extreme and unexplained criticisms, sometimes uttered during Thoreau's life, must have caused deep grief to his proud, sensitive heart. His own published journal-extracts and letters, and the testimony of his sister and many friends, have fully established the warmth and constancy of the controlled emotional and spiritual qualities. Dr. Edward Emerson has well summarized this relationship between his father and Thoreau;—"In spite of these barriers of temperament, my father always held him, as a man, in the highest honor."

Thoreau's kindly humanity and his rare fitness as companion were fully recognized by the Emerson household during his residence there. If the gentler traits were sometimes hidden from Emerson, they were revealed to Mrs. Emerson and the children, who have given the world loving memories of this household friend. In the "Familiar Letters" Mr. Sanborn has shown the tender, en-

nobling influence which Mrs. Emerson exerted upon Thoreau. One must also recognize her reciprocal regard and respect. This woman, who has been well described as "grace personified," in whom her husband found true embodiment of all Christianity, educed the finer and nobler qualities of Thoreau's heart and soul. In deep earnestness, which escaped all reserve, he wrote to her from Staten Island;—"The thought of you will constantly elevate my life; it will be something always above the horizon to behold, as when I look up at the evening star." With Mrs. Emerson, Thoreau discussed poetry and philosophy; he was elevated to his loftiest mental ascents, and again wrote,—"I feel taxed not to disappoint your expectation." In practical ways he was ever ready to aid her artistic efforts at gardening, and he alludes with gentle humor to this profession of his hostess-friend.

After noting the gentle inspiring influences of the Emerson home and child-life there upon Thoreau, one can readily believe that had the love of a husband and father come into his life, during these formative years, his emotional nature would have shown greater expansion and less constraint. Doubtless, there might have resulted a loss of mental independence and exclusive devotion to nature and poetry. For children, he had to the end of his

life the deepest affection. He was justly popular with them as teacher and story-teller. An incident which showed his tactful method of instruction, is recalled by one of the town children, who was often a member of his huckleberry-parties. When some child, in climbing a fence or scaling a wall, fell and lost his berries, Thoreau tenderly supplied the fruit from his own pail and then explained to the little ones how fortunate the mishap really was, since thus must seed be supplied for future berries. Among all Concord children, the girls and boy of the Emerson home retained his deep love to the close of life. He would tell them stories, replete with fancy and fact from natural history, he would organize and lead their excursions, or would champion their childish causes. He writes, with loving pride, that young Edward "asked me the other day, 'Mr. Thoreau, will you be my father?' I am occasionally Mr. Rough-and-Tumble with him that I may not miss him, lest he should miss you too much." Again, to the absent father, he writes: "Ellen and I have a good understanding. I appreciate her genuineness. Edith tells me after her fashion,—'By and by I shall grow up and be a woman, and then I shall remember how you exercised me.'" ("Familiar Letters," p. 162.)

Thoreau's friendship with the Emerson family

was ever a tender memory to him. When he left that home he wrote the poem, "The Departure," not printed until many years later, but expressing his gratitude in earnest, gracious words :—

* * * * * *

"This true people took the stranger,
And warm-hearted housed the ranger ;
They received their roving guest,
And have fed him with the best ;

"Whatsoe'er the land afforded
To the stranger's wish accorded,—
Shook the olive, stripped the vine,
And expressed the strengthening wine.

* * * * * *

"And still he stayed from day to day,
If he their kindness might repay ;
But more and more
The sullen waves came rolling towards the shore.

"And still, the more the stranger waited,
The less his argosy was freighted ;
And still the more he stayed,
The less his debt was paid."

Outside the Emerson household, perhaps rather closely related to it, was the first Concord friend to recognize the genius of Thoreau, anterior and preparatory to his acquaintance with Emerson. Mrs. Lucy Brown of Plymouth, the sister of Mrs. Emerson, who spent a large part of her years in Concord, was the caller to whom Helen Thoreau showed her brother's journal, with pride that it contained sentences like those of Emerson. As recorded, Mrs.

Brown borrowed the journal to show to her brother-in-law and thus laid the foundation for that famous literary friendship. For Mrs. Brown, as for her sister, Thoreau felt that romantic and reverential friendship which many a young man of poetic mind entertains for matrons of intellect and gracious character. Mrs. Brown especially encouraged Thoreau's poetic aspirations. Into her window he threw the copy of those early self-revelatory lines, perchance his best work in verse, "Sic Vita," beginning,—

> "I am a parcel of vain strivings, tied
> By a chance bond together."

With the poetry of gracious act as well as words, he placed this scrap of verse about a bunch of violets,—a delicate and romantic deed for the stoic and hermit! To her he wrote, ("Familiar Letters," p. 44,) "Just now I am in the mid-sea of verses, and they actually rustle around me as the leaves would round the head of Autumnus himself should he thrust it up through some vales which I know; but alas! many of them are but crisped and yellow leaves like his, I fear, and will deserve no better fate than to make mould for new harvests." During these years of young manhood, Thoreau confided to this friend his ideals, his dreams, and his rare delight in

nature. To her also, he complained of his unfitness for practical work; again, in a letter to her, already mentioned, he wrote one of his very few references to the death of his brother, John.

The names of Thoreau and Alcott have been often linked as vague idealists; both have also been called imitators of Emerson. It was once said of Alcott, with more wit than justice, "Emerson is the seer,—and Alcott the seer-sucker." While Alcott and Thoreau were friends, while both were extreme idealists, while both placed the soul-nourishment far superior to the body-maintenance, while both contended for reform from the drudgery and extravagance of society, they had wholly dissimilar natal traits. Alcott's serene, unanxious acceptance of practical perplexities caused Thoreau grave speculation; the artistic and improvident nature of Alcott, always impractical and easily duped, was in marked contrast to the exact, shrewd, busy temperament of Thoreau, who was a model of Yankee ingenuity and thrift, no less than type of nature-poet and philosopher. Reference has been made to the Emerson garden-study, designed by Alcott and condemned by Thoreau for its geometric and mechanical defects. Thoreau, however, always had a tender regard for the mystical, Platonic philosopher, whose idea of heaven was "a place

where you could have a little conversation." Writing to Emerson, Thoreau said of Alcott,—"When I looked at his gray hairs, his conversation sounded pathetic; but I looked again, and they reminded me of the gray dawn." To the end of his life, Thoreau, though conscious of all his friend's defects, recognized his aspirations and his purity of character. He found pleasure in walks and, when strength failed, in long talks with him. In turn, Alcott had a loyal love for Thoreau and a deep respect for his qualities of mind and poetic vision. In a letter to Mrs. Thoreau, (after her son's death), now first printed, Alcott said,—"We may be sure of his being read and prized by coming times, and the place and time pertaining to him shall be forever the sweeter for his presence."

Thoreau was a constant friend to the Alcott family; Louisa mentions his name among the bearers at the funeral of her sister Beth, and other memories by the sisters attest their cordial relations with him and his family. Among the keen characterizations of his Walden visitors, is the excellent pen picture of Alcott:—"One of the last of the philosophers,—Connecticut gave him to the world, —he peddled first her wares, afterwards, as he declares, his brains. These he peddles still, prompting God and disgracing man, bearing for fruit his

brain only, like the nut its kernel. I think that he must be the man of the most faith alive. His words and attitude always suppose a better state of things than other men are acquainted with, and he will be the last man to be disappointed as the ages revolve. . . . I think that he should keep a caravansary on the world's highway, where philosophers of all nations might put up, and on his sign should be printed, 'Entertainment for man, but not for his beast. Enter ye that have leisure and a quiet mind, who earnestly seek the right road. A blue-robed man, whose fittest roof is the overarching sky which reflects his serenity. I do not see how he can ever die; nature cannot spare him.'"

At one time Thoreau quoted Alcott as saying were he and Ellery Channing to live in the same house, they "would soon sit with their backs to each other." Both these poet-philosophers, diverse in temperament, united in a common devotion to Thoreau, and, in time, gained that mutual sympathy which ended in firm friendship for each other. Channing, the last survivor of this famous Concord group, passing away in December, 1901, was, in truth, "the last leaf upon the tree," of transcendental poetry. He possessed, to the last, a strange, contradictory personality and a unique, neglected

genius. By his own confession and the attestation of all his friends, he was a man of sudden, vacillating moods, with a perversity and improvidence which often brought despair to his own heart and home-circle. His was a heritage of high ideals and liberal intellect as his name, like that of his noble uncle, testified. After his college life was ended, and experimental years passed in various places, including a brief period in Illinois log-cabin life, he came to Concord in 1843. A few months younger than Thoreau he soon became his constant comrade after the death of John Thoreau. Emerson, also, found in Channing a stimulative companion on woodland walks. Both Channing and Thoreau, in their early poetic efforts, incurred the exaggerated criticism of being mere imitators of Emerson. In "A Fable for Critics," Lowell has clearly sneered at these two friends in the lines,—

"There comes . . . (Channing), for instance; to see him's rare sport
Tread in Emerson's tracks with legs painfully short;

* * * * * * *

"He follows as close as a stick to a rocket,
His fingers exploring the prophet's each pocket.
Fie! for shame, brother bard; with good fruit of your own,
Can't you let neighbor Emerson's orchards alone?
Besides, 'tis no use, you'll not find e'en a core,—
. . . (Thoreau) has picked up all the windfalls before."

Thoreau seems to have educed the lovable, com-

panionable qualities of this moody poet, though he was keenly conscious of his peculiarities. Professor Russell, who recalls Channing on an occasion of a visit to Concord and an evening at the Old Manse, has spoken of the gracious, inspiring companion that he found in him, on their return walk to the town. In "Walden," Thoreau recounts the visits of this friend, then coming all the distance from the hilltop of Ponkawtasset to the little lodge, where they enjoyed hours of "boisterous mirth" and serious talk and made "many a bran new theory of life over a thin dish of gruel." Channing's memorial verses and biography, no less than his poems, "The Wanderer" and "Near Home," have been among the most tender and illuminating revelations of Thoreau's mind and soul.

The world has ignored the poems of Channing, though they contain many rare thoughts and beautiful images. He carried to a far greater excess the philosophic trend and uneven, independent metres, which characterize the poetry of Emerson and Thoreau, yet he had deeper passion and more absorbing subjectivity than either of his friends. In "A Week," Thoreau refers with discriminating sympathy to the earlier poems of Channing,

"whose fine ray,
Doth often shine on Concord's twilight day,
Like those first stars, whose silver beams on high
Most travelers cannot at first descry,
But eyes that wont to range the evening sky."

Allusion has been made to the Sunday afternoon visits, at the Walden hut, of Edmund Hosmer, "who donned a frock instead of a professor's gown." This farmer of the exalted olden type, was the intimate adviser of Emerson and Thoreau on matters of varied import and, with him, their relations were always cordial and sympathetic. He is associated, also, with the Concord experience of George William Curtis. He was a man of strong, clear brain, keen judgment, and poetic instincts, whose home reeked with plenty and hospitality. His daughters, in their Concord home, with rare memorials and memories of the days of yore, are gracious, wise dispensers of their noble inheritance. Emerson's paper in *The Dial* for July, 1842, on "Agricultural Survey in Massachusetts," reflected his conversations with Mr. Hosmer. In his study of Brook Farm life, Mr. Lindsay Swift asserts that Emerson's decision, not to join this community, was due to the sagacious warnings of his farmer-friend. Hawthorne has, also, well portrayed Mr. Hosmer, with "his homely and self-acquired wisdom, a man of intellectual and moral substance, a sturdy fact, a

reality, something to be felt and touched, whose ideas seemed to be dug out of his mind as he digs potatoes, beets, carrots, turnips, out of the ground." It required no strained imagination to realize the delight which Thoreau ever found in the companionship of such an invigorating presence, a modern Cato or Varro.

Among the widely quoted thoughts of one of Thoreau's biographers is the statement that Channing, in a measure, was the interpreter between Hawthorne and Thoreau. While both the naturalist and the romancer found a companion in Channing, there is much evidence, both in Hawthorne's notebooks and in the letters of Thoreau, that, from the first appearance of Hawthorne at Concord, there existed a warm sympathy between himself and the poet-naturalist. Thoreau was among the few guests at table at the Old Manse; together they listened to the music-box, sailed upon the river, or sauntered along the wood-paths. For Thoreau, Hawthorne had deep regard both as nature-poet and "as a wholesome and healthy man to know." The famous little boat, in which the brothers had journeyed along the Concord and Merrimack, became the property of the romancer, was rechristened "The Water-Lily," and constantly reminded its owner of the marvelous skill of Thoreau with the

paddle and the oar. When Thoreau went to Staten Island, Hawthorne saw the wisdom of the change for physical reasons, but added the regret,—"On my own account I should like to have him remain here, he being one of the few persons, I think, with whom to hold intercourse is like hearing the wind among the boughs of a forest tree; and, with all this wild freedom, there is a high and classic cultivation in him too." Of the review of a series of papers which Thoreau contributed to *The Dial*, Hawthorne wrote in his note-book,—"Methinks this article gives a very fair image of his mind and character,—so true, innate and literal in observation, yet giving the spirit as well as the letter of what he sees, even as a lake reflects its wooded banks, showing every leaf, yet giving the wild beauty of the whole scene. . . . There is a basis of good sense and of moral truth, too, throughout the article, which, also, is a reflection of his character." Scarcely did Thoreau need an interpreter with a friend who could thus understand and illumine his mind and soul.

One cannot leave the Concord friends without mention of Elizabeth and Edward Hoar, who recognized the genius of Thoreau and his nobleness of character, while to him they showed many proofs of sincere friendship. On his departure for Staten

Island, Elizabeth Hoar gave him the ink-stand to which his letters refer. In a cordial note, given with the remembrance, she wrote,—"and I am unwilling to let you go away without telling you that I, among your other friends, shall miss you much and follow you with remembrance and all the best wishes and confidence." Thoreau was deeply appreciative of such friendship from the noble woman, whom Emerson always regarded as sister, after the death of his brother Charles to whom she was betrothed, and whose presence, says Emerson, "consecrates." Thoreau mentions her with reverence as "my brave townswoman, to be sung of poets." Edward Sherman Hoar, her brother, was one of Thoreau's later friends and contributed to him many comforts during the last months of weakness. Though some years his senior, Thoreau found in Hoar a delightful comrade in mountain excursion and woodland tramp, as long as strength allowed. To the kind thought of this friend, he owed the long drives which gave him mild exercise and refreshing air, after the body had lost its pristine vigor. Mr. Hoar was, for many years, a magistrate in California; on his return to Concord, he preferred the quiet life of a scholar and nature-student, and in Thoreau he recognized a magician-teacher. The epitaph of Mr. Hoar accentuates the qualities

which made the two men so congenial;—"He cared nothing for the wealth or fame his rare genius might easily have won. But his ear knew the songs of all birds. His eye saw the beauty of flowers and the secret of their life. His unerring taste delighted in what was best in books. So his pure and quiet days reaped their rich harvest of wisdom and content."

Outside other local friends, among whom Mr. Sanborn has exemplified his friendship by the biographical and editorial work to which all students of Thoreau are deeply indebted, he had a practical adviser and business colleague in Horace Greeley. For Thoreau, Greeley arranged terms for articles in Graham's, Putnam's, and other magazines, advanced him money for literary uses, and tenaciously gained for him the long-deferred remuneration from editors. He was ever appreciative of the ability of Thoreau and somewhat shared the regret of Emerson at the non-fulfilment of a wider literary fame for his young friend. When Thoreau first called upon Greeley in New York, he was impressed by the kindly greeting,—"now be neighborly,"—and described this busy, erratic editor as "cheerfully in earnest, a hearty New Hampshire boy as one would wish to meet." ("Familiar Letters," p. 114.)

Among Thoreau's earlier friends, to become also

his literary critic, was Margaret Fuller. While editor of *The Dial*, she examined,—and rejected, —some of his poems and essays. Appreciating that their author was "healthful, rare, of open eye, ready hand, and noble scope," she also saw in him "a somewhat bare hill, which the warm gales of spring have not visited." Her censure was keen, and well emphasized the startling beauties, combined with the sternness and ruggedness of much of Thoreau's early writing. Though Margaret Fuller was in Concord often for many years, and met Thoreau constantly at the homes of his friends, their relations were never very cordial on the part of Thoreau. Like Emerson, he appreciated the mental gifts of this woman, the "new woman" type of her day, but her efforts to win intimate friendship failed to gain response from either author. The "repulsions," which Emerson records with regret against her personality, were shared by many acquaintances in both Concord and Boston. Some of the sentences in "A Week" are often explained as personal references to Margaret Fuller;—"a restless and intelligent mind, interested in her own culture, who not a little provokes me, and, I suppose, is stimulated in turn by myself." After the tragic shipwreck and drowning of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, with her husband and son, Thoreau was one of the first

family friends to hasten to the coast off Fire Island, to give service and care to her mother and brother. The latter, Richard Fuller, was a valued comrade of Thoreau on many excursions, and to him he owed his treasured music-box.

In Thoreau's later life he carried on an extended revelatory correspondence with two men of poetic and meditative minds, who justly deserve rank among his most devoted and appreciative friends. One of these was Mr. Daniel Ricketson of New Bedford. The acquaintance began in 1854, as a result of the purchase of a copy of "Walden." The letters continued until Thoreau's death, with frequent interchange of visits; in truth, Mr. Ricketson remained a cordial friend to the family after Thoreau's death. His many letters to Miss Sophia Thoreau, which it has been my privilege to read, reveal a character of rare insight and religious beauty. He was a poet-botanist and had built, and occupied for hours daily, a "shanty" near his beautiful home in New Bedford. Thoreau, who was much interested in the flora of this region and in the marine plants of Nantucket, often visited this friend from 1854 until 1861. As mentioned, it was on the last visit that the ambrotype was taken from which the Ricketson medallion was made. It was this friend who described the first sight

of Thoreau, as he approached his home unexpectedly, with "a portmanteau in one hand and an umbrella in the other," looking "like a peddlar of small wares." To offset any suspicion of reproach for this initial vision, however, Mr. Ricketson always testified to the courtesy and fine-breeding of Thoreau as host or guest. In one of the letters to Miss Sophia, this friend gives a true glimpse of his own composite nature, which would so fully satisfy the ideals of his philosopher-teacher,—"Busy about farm-work but not neglectful of the Muses."

Among the letters from Mr. Ricketson are two written to Thoreau during his last weeks of illness. In one he chronicles, with the accuracy of the naturalist and the rapture of the poet, the signs of incipient spring from the wild geese and the golden-winged woodpecker to the robin and the catkins, a surety that Thoreau retained, to the last, his strong interest in nature. The second letter is here reproduced entire; it shows the warm, noble friendship and also proclaims the sure faith of this Quaker poet-naturalist, a quality which enhanced the affinity between the two men :—

"THE SHANTY, BROOKLAWN,
"*13th April, 1862.*

"MY DEAR FRIEND:

"I received a letter from your dear sister a few days ago informing me of your continued

illness, and prostration of physical strength, which I was not altogether unprepared to learn, as our valued friend, Mr. Alcott, who wrote me by your sister's request in February last, said that you were confined at home and very feeble. I am glad however to learn from Sophia that you still find comfort and are happy, the reward I have no doubt of a virtuous life, and an abiding faith in the wisdom and goodness of our Heavenly Father. It is undoubtedly wisely ordained that our present lives should be mortal. Sooner or later we must all close our eyes for the last time upon the scenes of this world, and oh! how happy are they who feel the assurance that the spirit shall survive the earthly tabernacle of clay, and pass on to higher and happier spheres of experience.

> " 'It must be so,—Plato, thou reasoneth well :—
> Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire
> This longing after immortality ? '
>
> " ADDISON,—CATO.

> " 'The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
> Lets in new light through chinks that time has made ;
> Stronger by weakness, wiser men become,
> As they draw near to their eternal home
> Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view
> Who stand upon the threshold of the new.'
>
> " WALLER.

It has been the lot of but few, dear Henry, to extract so much from life as you have done. Although you number fewer years than many who have lived wisely before you, yet I know of no one, either in the past or present times, who has drunk so deeply from the sempiternal spring of truth and knowledge, or who in the poetry and beauty of every-day life has enjoyed more, or contributed more to the happiness of others. Truly, you have

not lived in vain, your works, and above all, your brave and truthful life, will become a precious treasure to those whose happiness it has been to have known you, and who will continue, though with feebler hands, the fresh and instructive philosophy you have taught them.

"But I cannot yet resign my hold upon you here. I will still hope, and if my poor prayer to God may be heard, would ask that you may be spared to us awhile longer at least. This is a lovely spring day here,—warm and mild,—the thermometer in the shade at 62° above zero (3 P. M.). I write with my shanty door open and my west curtain down to keep out the sun,—a red-winged blackbird is regaling me with a querulous, half-broken song, from a neighboring tree just in front of the house, and the gentle wind is soughing through my young pines. . . . I wish at least to devote the remainder of my life, whether longer or shorter, to the cause of truth and humanity,—a life of simplicity and humility. Pardon me for thus dwelling on myself.

"Hoping to hear of your more favorable symptoms, but committing you (all unworthy as I am) into the tender care of the great Shepherd, who 'tempers the wind to the shorn lamb,'

"I remain, my dear friend and counsellor,

"Ever faithfully yours,

"DAN'L RICKETSON."

A man of Thoreau's courage of thought and act is sure to win hero-worship from young men of poetic, responsive natures. To Concord came occasional visitors from England, attracted by Emerson's fame. Such often returned impressed by the

original force of Thoreau's mind and his life-example. Among these travelers was young Thomas Cholmondeley of Shropshire, England, who came to Concord in 1854 and lodged with the Thoreaus. He was the nephew of Bishop Heber, was a pupil of Arthur Hugh Clough at Oriel, and had been given letters by the latter for Emerson. He had already published a volume, "Ultima Thule," descriptive of a visit to a New Zealand colony. With Channing and Thoreau, he made some excursions to adjacent mountains and, in 1855, he returned to England to take part in the Crimean War. The correspondence, during the next few years, shows his devotion to Thoreau and the strong influence exerted by the simple, lofty ideals of the Concord naturalist. Clearly, this youth won from Thoreau a half-promise to visit him in England when the war was ended. For Thoreau's library and scholarly researches he sent a gift of peculiar value,—fifty-four large, expensive volumes on Hindoo literature,—many of them rare in America. Thoreau was delighted with this "nest of Indian books"; in a letter to a friend, he compared his joy of possession to what he might have experienced "at the birth of a child." In return he sent to Cholmondeley his own volumes, some of Emerson's, and a copy of "Leaves of Grass," which first aroused

perplexing question in literary England over the unique genius of Whitman. In November, 1858, Cholmondeley came again to Concord and urged Thoreau to join him in a trip south, but the severe illness of Thoreau's father prevented. His letters disclose fine scholarship in this young Englishman, so soon to suffer tragic death abroad; he was well versed in past and current science and history; he was alert with the *euphoria* and hope of early manhood. Mr. Ricketson, who met him at Thoreau's home, mentioned a striking resemblance to George William Curtis. Devoted to Thoreau, he imbibed many of his ideas on the simplification of life. It is related that on his first visit he came to Concord with the customary luggage of a rich Englishman, not omitting a valet; the keen, caustic, yet philosophic comments of Thoreau on the superfluities of custom so influenced him that on his second visit he was most simply clad and unburdened by paraphernalia.

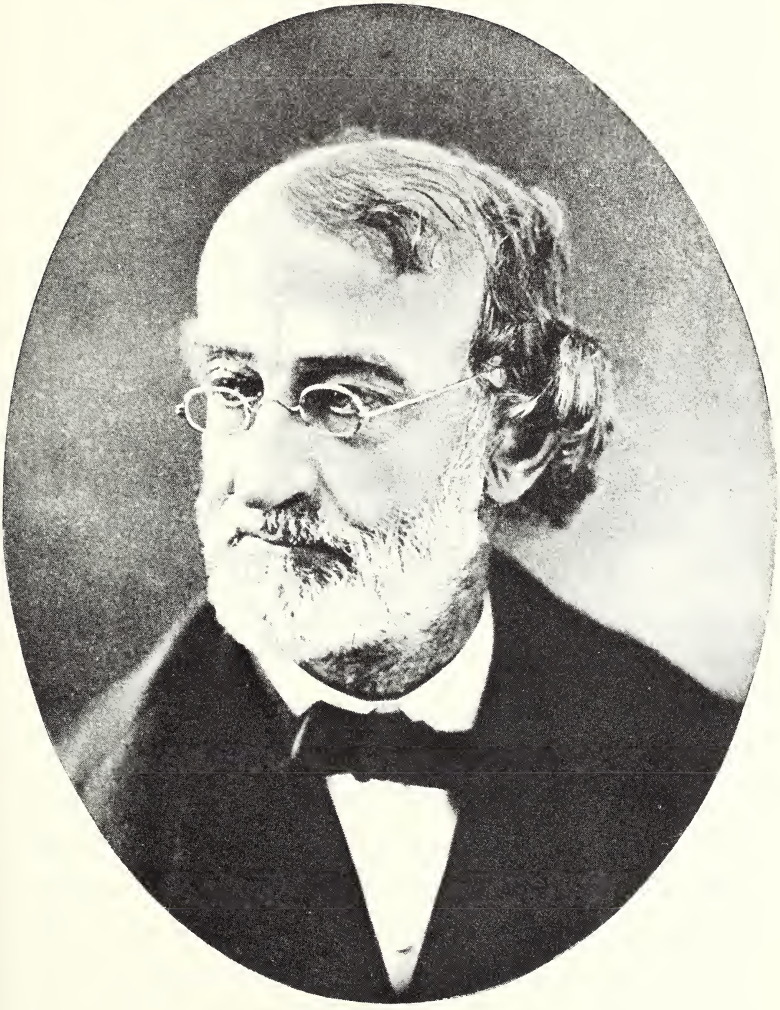
A mystery long lurked about a "Western correspondent" of Thoreau during his later years. He has been identified as Mr. Calvin Greene of Rochester, Michigan. The acquaintance arose, as did others of the later friendships, from the books which Thoreau had published. Mr. Greene was an ardent admirer of free, original thought and also an

earnest student of nature. He was much impressed by the courage and lofty ideals of the author of "Walden," which he found and read by chance. He began and maintained an inspiring correspondence during the last years of his teacher's life. Some of the letters written by Thoreau to this man of secluded, ennobling life have been privately published by Dr. Jones of Ann Arbor.

There was one intimate friend of Thoreau's later manhood who, after the death of Miss Sophia, became her brother's literary executor, Harrison Gray Otis Blake. Their friendship was deeply spiritual, perhaps most closely approximating Thoreau's ideal, —"mysterious cement of the soul." In the letters to Mr. Blake, which are included in the collection by Emerson in 1865 and also in "Familiar Letters," are some of Thoreau's most unreserved confessions of heart and soul. He once wrote to this friend,—"it behooves me, if I would reply, to speak out of the rarest part of myself." It has been said that their relation was wholly intellectual and impersonal but such statement is unjust. To both men, the ideals and soul-problems outweighed mere mundane matters, but there was ever a bond of warm heart-sympathy between them. Blake gave to Thoreau the devotion and rapt admiration of a pupil-friend. Blake, however, was the elder by a few months; he

had been in Harvard when Thoreau was there, graduating from the Divinity School in 1839, when Emerson, by his famous address, sent quivers of apprehension through Calvinist creeds. Mr. Blake became deeply interested in Emerson and adopted many of his theological tenets. He was himself a preacher at Milford, New Hampshire, when Emerson resigned his pastorate and received such sharp censure, especially from Professor Norton. Mr. Blake, indignant at the attacks on Emerson, wrote a letter of sympathy and thus began that earlier friendship which became the medium of the later paramount influence in the life of Blake.

Leaving the church as a permanent profession, since he refused to accept many of its dogmas, Mr. Blake taught school, first at Boston, in the old Park Church, and then came to Worcester, his native city. Here he had classes for many years. A son of Francis Blake, a noted lawyer, bearing the name of a famous ancestor, Mr. Blake was by birth and education a man of matchless refinement and scholarship. His home was a model of sincere dignity and hospitality, as Thoreau often witnessed. Thither he came frequently after the acquaintance began, through the agency of Emerson, in 1848; he visited, also, at the home of Mr. Theophilus Brown. As mentioned, Thoreau lectured often at



HARRISON GRAY OTIS BLAKE

Photogravure of a portrait from life

the parlors of Mr. Blake. Together they made excursions to the adjacent hills and lakes. During the last four years of Mr. Blake's life he was a great sufferer. As long as he was able to walk, however, he carried the cane which had been Thoreau's,—a plain stick of black alder with the bark shaved away on one side and notched as a two-foot rule. This was of great service to its later owner and was valued, not alone for its association, but because it supplied him with exact measurement. His trait, *par excellence* in all things, like that of his master, was precision; he never "guessed," he always studied the actual truth in matters of physical as well as intellectual moment. With absolute precision he kept a diary, after the type of Thoreau's, with abundant reflections and a few events. The latter were of little variety in this quiet, scholarly life, the thoughts were many and varied. Though avoiding strangers, he was one of the most companionable of friends, and was so kindly and warm-hearted that, even at the age of eighty, he was known to his few intimates as "Harry" Blake. After the journals of Thoreau became his sacred trust, he spent his days in close study of the nature-observations and lofty ideals of this teacher. To his careful editing we owe the volumes,—"Early Spring in Massachusetts," "Summer," "Winter,"

"Autumn," and also a volume of selected "Thoughts." To the last week of his life, when the eye was almost past reading, he applied his mind to the work which had been his greatest inspiration and blessing.

One might search long to find two men of such moral fibre as were Thoreau and Blake,—for their characteristics in this regard were identical. At the memorial service following the death of Mr. Blake in 1898, his friend, Prof. E. Harlow Russell, to whom he has committed the Thoreau manuscripts, uttered this succinct sentence,—"He was such a man as rendered an oath in a court of justice a superfluity." Could more fitting word be found to express the moral perfection of Thoreau as well as Blake? The latter lacked the physical vigor and the vivacious instincts of his friend; he was subject to moods of depression as well as of exaltation; he was far more of a philosopher than a naturalist; he had poetic ideals but lacked the power of expressing them. Despite such minor differences his qualities of mind, heart, and soul were accordant with those of Thoreau to a degree almost incredible and unexampled. Appropriate for the epitaph of both was the title-line of a Worcester newspaper after Mr. Blake's memorial service,—"Devoted to Ideals of Highest Type."

Thoreau's letters to this Worcester friend were of unusual length and details in matters of advice and soul-nutriment. They seem sometimes nebulous and mystic in ideality; again, they are replete with strong thought and practical suggestion. The sturdiness of tone often recalls the "Ice-water tonic" on a sultry day, in which Alcott once imaged the influence of Thoreau.

Every friend of Thoreau, in earlier or in later life, felt the elevating influence of his masterly mind, his rare vision of nature, his poetic conception of nature's laws and growths, his brave independence of living, and his unswerving adherence to the inner truth and spiritual ideal. Whether incited to deeper thoughts and less regard for the trivialities of life, inspired to a new understanding of the beauties and messages of birds and flowers, or nerved to requisite courage and self-reliance to meet the perplexities and depressions of daily life, each friend could repeat with Emerson,—

> "The fountains of my hidden life
> Are through thy friendship fair."

Thoreau as Naturalist

CHAPTER VIII

THOREAU AS NATURALIST

THE phrase, poet-naturalist, has been generally accepted as Thoreau's most pertinent epithet. This term, used by Channing as title for the life of his friend, has been commonly accredited to his invention. In "Walden," however, one may read Thoreau's own union of the two phrases,—possibly a suggestion to his biographer. In outlining his development as naturalist, Thoreau applies these progressive steps to the average youth in his relations with nature;—"He goes thither at first as a hunter and fisher, until at last, if he has the seeds of a better life in him, he distinguishes his proper objects as a poet or a naturalist it may be, and leaves the gun and fish-pole behind." Thus did Thoreau transform himself from the boy-hunter and angler into the student, poet, and philosopher of nature. His brother was a skilful and enthusiastic sportsman. The pupil's journal, before cited, suggests memories of many expeditions for game with "Mr. John." The two brothers often joined small parties for trapping and fishing, for Henry

also was very expert in sport. To him had been given calculating skill of remarkable exactness, for distance, number, speed, etc. It was related that at any time, if asked to choose a dozen pencils from a large bunch, he would grasp at once the requisite number. With gun and bait, also, he could quickly surpass his companions.

As boy and man, however, Thoreau had, in marked degree, a poet's love for nature mingled with the delicate, vibrant fibres of a naturalist, in its true meaning of a student-lover of outdoor life, not a dissector of indoor specimens. By inheritance and environment, the influence of Nature, as companion, was basal in his life. He has been compared to Saint Francis in his affinity for flower and bird; both met sure response of animal magnetism to their sympathetic, loving comradeship. Of Thoreau's earnest love and reverence for nature's children, Mr. Bradford Torrey has well said,—"Nature was not his playground but his study, his Bible, his closet, his means of grace." So responsive was he to the moods of the woods and skies that he delighted to be called autochthonous. Not alone did he watch for the blossoming plants, the autumnal tints, and the first note of the hylodes, but there was a subtle revelation to him beyond the reach of ordinary eye or ear, however

well-trained they might be. With delight at finding the first specimen of *ledum latifolium*, with its dark, red-purplish leaves, he confesses;—"As usual with the finding of new plants, I had a presentiment that I should find the ledum in Concord. It is a remarkable fact that in the case of the most interesting plants which I have discovered in this vicinity, I have anticipated finding them perhaps a year before the discovery." (Journal, February 4, 1858.) Such experiences may be the common result of acute intuition, combined with rare concentration of interest and observation, yet they evidence none the less this marvelous insight and responsiveness which he had for nature-secrets. To him, as high-priest, the "inner secret of the universe" seemed about to unfold. Fully conscious of this transcendental insight, he wrote,—"The seasons and all their changes are in me." In winter he found a new annual pleasure in the glaze and leaf crystals, the purple vapor and indigo shadows, the walks over frozen rivers and marshes; again, with a poet's rapture, he welcomed the first signs of spring, in the delicate coloring of earth, the clear, oozing sap from the maples and the tortoise moving in the ditches. Then could he proclaim,—"Here is my Italy, my heaven, my New England."

Essentially a scholar and an author as he was,

there were moods when the classics failed to satisfy him, when nature alone could bring happiness. Every one has such occasional cravings; Thoreau was possessed by them until they became potent influences of each day, perennial sources of inspiration. With this sentiment he wrote that delicate, whimsical stanza in his first volume,

> "Tell Shakespeare to attend some leisure hour,
> For now I've business with this drop of dew,
> And see you not, the clouds prepare a shower,—
> I'll meet him shortly when the sky is blue."

Thoreau's delight in the wild, in bogs and marshes, in fierce rains and drifting snows, was due, in part, to his indigenous love for all forms of outdoor life; in part, to his craving especially for those forms which ministered to his sturdiness and sense of freedom. On "imported sods" he disliked to walk, since here his thoughts became "heavy and lumpish as if fed on turnips"; when he could walk on woodland path or stubbed pasture land, he felt a tonic, as if he "nibbled ground nuts."

There has been a tendency to overestimate Thoreau's delight in the uncultivated. It has been suggested that he might have spent his life happily in the caves of the aboriginal settlers. As his retirement from Walden proved, he found in seclusion in nature the best opportunities for study and ex-

pansion, but he did not desire to relinquish his home and friends. After return from the Maine Woods he said with distinctness on this point,—"For a permanent residence it seemed to me that there could be no comparison between this (Concord) and the wilderness, necessary as the latter is for a resource and a background, the raw material of our civilization. The wilderness is simple almost to barrenness. The partially cultivated country it is which has inspired and will continue to inspire, the strains of poets such as compose the mass of any literature." As an expert gardener, he exampled his pleasure in culture of the fields no less than of the mind. A letter from his sister Helen, in 1844, refers to the practical and decorative work of Henry,—"He has set out about forty trees and has made a bank around the house so we begin to look quite cultivated." He always gave valuable aid to his sisters in caring for the garden and house flowers. He never disdained, rather he urged, simple, artistic gardening, but he feared that excess of cultivation which might supplant the natural beauty and simplicity of nature. Perhaps he had visions of some of the crudities of modern landscape gardening.

The reader is sometimes reminded of Whitman in Thoreau's rhapsodies on free, sensuous nature.

There are suggestions of Whitman's "The Sun-Bath," without his expressions of crude animalism, in the poetic fancy in "A Week," depicting the delight of resting on a summer's day "up to one's chin on some retired swamp, scenting the wild honey-suckle and bilberry blows and lulled by the minstrelsy of gnats and mosquitoes." To Thoreau, wildness was a stimulant and a panacea for village life and the distractions of society. Such doctrine is applied in current life with a full measure undreamed in his day. Fifty years ago a man who took walks in the country, as a part of his daily life-schedule, or a woman who took her book or sewing under the trees or by the pond, represented a minority in the community for whom their friends assumed an apologetic tone. Present-day recreations, "fresh-air" excursions, classes sauntering into woods and fields for practical study, family life and domestic pursuits transacted on the spacious piazzas of modern homes,—such healthful signs of the times indicate the stimulative, prophetic force of teachings and examples like those of Thoreau and his few disciples. The modern world has at last accepted his emphasis of the intellectual and moral sanity, no less than the bodily vigor, which can be gained only by a free, constant comradeship with nature.

It is difficult to divorce the observer from the poet-philosopher in Thoreau's relations with outdoor life. In truth, the qualities are interdependent. Critics have attempted to prove that Thoreau's gifts, as naturalist, were wholly emotional and reflective, that he was "a sensitive feeler" but a deficient observer. His own confessions offer evidence of the keen, delicate response of both his senses and his soul to the open and subtle phases of nature. Sights and sounds, however, thrilled him less than the lofty visions and ideals which they symbolized. "There is a flower for every mood of the mind." The birds and insects spoke messages of purity and faith to his soul as well as to his ear. Through this same sensitiveness of emotion and feeling, in its literal meaning, he was attuned to all external signs of the weather. He was barometer as well as botanist. He called himself "The self-appointed inspector of snow-storms and rain-storms."

As naturalist, he was especially accurate and exhaustive in description rather than in classification. The minute portraiture of the expansion of a pine-cone, or the evolution of a moth, the gradual unfolding of a sunrise glory on a foggy morning, the careful examination of nature's healing moss to replace turf which had been torn away,—such are some of his detailed word-pictures that linger in

the reader's memory. He complained because the modern botanist measured plants instead of describing them, according to the mode of Gerard and the earlier naturalists. In observations, and in descriptions alike, he was ever more poet than scientist. The plain sorrel seemed to his imagination like "blood mantling in the cheek of the beautiful year," the common stubble in winter became glorified and visualized by the amber sunset light, the glitter and joy of the river bursting through the ice symbolized the soul rejoicing in its future. All nature's movements seemed to him the song of love;—"The song of the birds is an epithalamium, a hymeneal. The marriage of the flowers spots the meadows and fringes the hedges with pearls and diamonds. In the deep water, in the high air, in woods and pastures, and the bowels of the earth, this is the employment and condition of all things."

In observation, Thoreau's methods were those of a romancer with nature, her poet-lover. He would sit quietly for hours on a tree-trunk until the birds would come and join him; he would float idly in his boat, and the fishes would nibble at his fingers or even rest on the palm of his hand. His loftiest aim was to "live as tenderly and gently as one would pluck a flower." He preserved hundreds of specimens but he was always cautious to avoid any

FAIRHAVEN BAY

Thoreau's methods were those of a romancer with nature, her poet-lover

bruise or blight to adjacent weeds or roots. His strong pantheistic faith, no less than his poetic sentiment, fostered this tenderness for grasses, birds and animals. As years passed, he became a vegetarian in general diet, though he was never wholly ascetic in this regard. Here as elsewhere, the poet incited the human impulses. His chief objection to animal food was because of its bestial, coarse suggestions; "it offended his imagination." After the months at Walden, in close companionship with bird and fish, he wrote,—"I cannot fish without failing a little in self-respect." In "The Maine Woods," his memory lingers sadly over "the murder" of the moose, and his share in this adventure affected the pleasure of his trip and called forth a confession that, for weeks after, his nature resented this lapse into coarseness. To make his life in accord with nature, he must be kind to all her offspring. One of his latest interviews, only a few days before his death, was with a party of boys who had been robbing birds' nests. He touched their deepest feelings, even to tears, as he described the "wail of sorrow and anguish" which they had caused to their "little brothers of the air," to borrow the poetic phrase of a later ornithologist.

Mr. Salt, in his biography of Thoreau, has dis-

tinguished well between his traits as naturalist and as anatomist. The thoughts of dissection were, in the main, revolting to his fine-grained, poetic nature; moreover, he lived before the modern methods of science had demonstrated the comparatively brief suffering and the vast benefits from careful vivisection. When a friend suggested that he could best study the structure of a bird after it had been killed, his answer was characteristic,—"Do you think I should shoot you if I wanted to study you?" In quite similar vein, he wrote in his journal, November 1, 1853, an excerpt included in "Autumn":—"Can he who slays the elephant for his ivory be said to have seen the elephant? No, these are petty and accidental uses. . . . Every creature is better alive than dead, both men and moose and pine-trees, as life is more beautiful than death." The spy-glass and the flute were his media for allurement and for study. He found music a strong attraction to bird and fish, as well as animal, and, as he quietly played like a modern Pan, he could best watch and study the form, movement, and subtle traits of these friends of woods and lakes. In his lecture on "Walking," he said,—"The highest that we can attain to is not knowledge, but sympathy with intelligence." In such a statement how surely he predicted the new doc-

trines of education for this generation which should succeed his own!

Our southern poet, Sidney Lanier, personified the clover and the clouds as "cousins"; he apostrophized the "tender, sisterly, sweetheart leaves." So this earlier nature-poet of Concord emphasized the kinship between trees, flowers, birds and men. Emerson called Thoreau "the bachelor of nature"; rather he was her lover. Recall that romantic personification of the oak;—"I love and could embrace the shrub oak. . . . What cousin of mine is the shrub oak? Rigid as iron, clean as the atmosphere, hardy as virtue, innocent and sweet as a maiden is the shrub oak." At Walden, the mice and the squirrels, the loons, the ants, the phœbe in his shed, the robin in his nearest pine-tree, became the friends from whom he learned many lessons and upon whom he bestowed all honor and love. Even the wasps, that settled on his walls, furnished him with unique study, and "did not molest seriously."

He found great pleasure in instructing children regarding the proper attitude, not fear and wantonness but sympathy, in their relations with animals and reptiles. A boy who was thus taught a valuable lesson has recalled, in his late manhood, this incident. When working at Barrett's mill, the boys were anxious to go swimming in the pond but

some of them, notably the narrator, were afraid of water snakes and refused to go. Thoreau, who was often a visitor at the mill, chanced to be present and noted the common fear. He assured the boys that the snakes would not harm them, but they still demurred. Finally, he asked permission to have the water shut off, and found a snake three feet long; he picked it up, to the consternation of his audience and, holding it in his hand, showed the boys that the tail lacked any sting, that its head was so formed that it could not bite,—in fact, that this type of snake could do them no possible injury.

With characteristic reserve, he preferred to example rather than explain his theories and discoveries. He did not argue, but he interpreted. One of the resident pupils, whose admiration for John Thoreau, as mentioned, exceeded his liking for Henry, has related for my use an incident wherein Thoreau's refusal to explain seems almost culpable. He had just announced, regarding common manifestations in nature, that "everything was a miracle." The boy, who had been preparing some fish to fry and had thrown their heads into the garbage, with quizzical, but natural, interest, asked Thoreau if this recent act was a miracle. He received "Yes" for answer but was refused further

explanations. The boy long remembered and resented the extreme and mysterious application. Perchance, Thoreau did not think it wise to perplex a boy of eleven years with the doctrines of decay, fermentation, and fertilization, though, as a pioneer evolutionist, he realized that these processes were, in truth, miraculous.

In recognizing the poet-philosopher in Thoreau one must not underrate his rank and work as naturalist. While essentially the poet, girding himself to be "a hunter of the beautiful," he was, not the less, a practical, keen observer and recorder of facts. Unconsciously, he uttered his own characterization,—"Facts fall from the poetic observer as ripe seeds." Granting certain omissions, his impetus as pioneer American naturalist is now generally acknowledged. He overlooked certain botanical varieties then and now found in Concord; it must be recalled, however, that a few of the flora, whose omission in his journal has sometimes been cited, have been introduced into Concord within more recent years by Mr. Pratt and other botanists. Thoreau emphasized, as if discovered by himself, occasional local varieties long recognized by the few naturalists of the region. They had not, however, often published their researches. When he speaks of the *hibiscus moscheutos* and cer-

tain forms of the orchis and polygonum, in a tone of pioneer information, one must recall that his day afforded meagre facilities for classification and identification. Moreover, his pride was of the kind suggested in the first chapter,—an idealization of Concord as a centre of observation and collation. After reading the story of the Arctic discoveries by Kane, he caused a laugh among his friends by asserting that many of the same plants and formations might be found in the vicinity of his home; searching diligently, he did identify one or two of the northern flora, or their counterparts, and exulted in the discovery of red snow. His descriptions are intended to glorify Concord, not to exalt himself. Its landscape is made beautiful to him and his readers by simple pictures,—the delicate, pale purple spikes of the orchis amid the hellebore and ferns of the alder swamp, or the *polygonum articulatum* "with its slender dense racemes of rose-tinted flowers, apparently without leaves, rising cleanly out of the sand." Even the common shells on the shore of river and lakes near Concord are vested with unusual beauty in their freshly-colored nacre.

If he lacked the penetrative eye of some modern trained naturalists who, through his volumes and those of later students, can quickly anticipate and

identify varieties, he became versed in a score of nature-forms unknown before his day, he laid the foundations for study of that exhaustive botanical and ornithological region that centres about Concord. In reading Thoreau's journals, as published, one must ever remember that he did not accomplish his own aim, in sifting and revising his notes for press. Doubtless, had he lived to thus publish the volumes, he would have greatly improved their arrangement and value, both by additions and eliminations. In these personal journal-notes, however, compact and orderly even in their incompleteness, one realizes the immense amount of Thoreau's knowledge and its practical value to the naturalists of these later decades. The volumes which narrate excursions to the ocean, or the Maine woods, contain a few facts of natural history, which are suggestive and indicative of his careful method of travel, always eager to note some new fact, to discover some significant trait in nature and in humanity, wherever he might loiter.

His service as naturalist is largely restricted to an exhaustive survey of the soil, products, and landscape about Concord, with the accompanying forms of insect, bird, and animal life. Though thus narrow in theme, his method is remarkable for its breadth and caution, an example to his disciples in

whatever branch of science. He was among the first naturalists to study the commonplace; with thoroughness characteristic of all his work, the usual and the rare, the beautiful and the bastard growths receive undiscriminating record. If the water-lily and the *clintonia borealis* thrilled him to poetic terms, he gave no less graphic mention to the clover, bluets, lambkill and convolvulus. He watched the graceful swing of the butterfly but he called attention to the hidden grace of "the yellow-winged grasshopper with blackish eyes." The lark and the robin were his feathered friends of special honor but he never failed to note and portray with enthusiasm the crow, the cat-bird, and the marsh-hawk, venting his "winged energy" in "a split squeal." In commenting on the sonorousness of nature's sounds, he examples most often the tones usually heard with indifference,—the hum of insects, the crowing of the cocks, the booming of the ice, or the telegraph wire with a "melody like Anacreon and Meander." It is significant that in an index of his manuscript journals, and in the volumes edited by Mr. Blake, there are the greatest number of references to the dandelions, chickadees, turtles, and like common and less poetic forms of nature.

While still a young man Thoreau received recog-

nition as a naturalist of authority, when he was asked to write a review for *The Dial*, in July, 1842. This pristine journal of nature-facts, or embryonic science and philosophy, is about to gain a new interest among readers by the republication in available form of its four volumes. In the number indicated, the article by Thoreau, which has seemed to escape the detailed attention of his biographers, has a most interesting explanatory note by Emerson. It offers proof of Thoreau's wide knowledge of geology, botany, and bird-craft, even in these early years of his studies. In the preliminary note, the editor, whose personality as Mr. Emerson is quickly revealed, explains the purpose of the review and introduces its author thus:—"We were thinking how we might best celebrate the good deed which the State of Massachusetts has done, in procuring the scientific survey of the Commonwealth, whose result is recorded in these volumes, when we found a near neighbor and friend of ours, dear also to the Muses, a native and an inhabitant of Concord, who readily undertook to give us such comments as he had made on these books, and, better still, notes of his own conversation with nature in the woods and waters of this town. With all thankfulness we have begged our friend to lay down the oar and fishing-line, which none can

handle better, and assume the pen, that Isaak Walton and White of Selborne might not want a successor, nor the fair meadows to which we also have owed a home and the happiness of many years, their poet."

The essay, unique and representative of Thoreau's style, reviewed the committee's reports on fishes, birds, insects, plants, etc., with keen, discriminating judgment. The paper differed wholly from any ordinary criticism on scientific themes, as all of Thoreau's work differed from that of the ordinary author. Many reflective and metrical comments were interspersed, some of them used later in his first book, others forming the nucleus for later poems. The memory of winter hours, brightened by visions of summer fields, contains certain stanzas suggestive of his later poem on Musketaquid. Not alone are the poetic passages identified at once as Thoreau's work, but the prose as well bears his literary signet. Especially characteristic are the sentences on nature versus society; in them are the germs of later, more expulsive thoughts;—"In society you will not find health, but in nature. Society is always diseased and the best is the most so. There is no scent in it so wholesome as that of the pines, nor any fragrance so penetrating and restorative as the life-everlasting in high pastures.

Men tire me when I am not constantly greeted and refreshed by the flux of sparkling streams." Thoreau expressed surprise that the veery, the wood-thrush so familiar to New England, was "apparently unknown by the writer of this report." After describing the bird, he added an interesting personal note. He recalled that in his own college days, in Cambridge he had heard the college yard ring with its trill. The boys call it 'yorrick,' from the sound of its querulous and chiding note, as it flits near the traveler through the underwood." The stanzas on the vireo, appearing in a later edition of his poems, are followed by these graphic lines on the crow:—

"Thou dusky spirit of the wood,
Bird of an ancient brood,
Flitting thy lonely way,
A meteor in the summer's day
From wood to wood, from hill to hill,
Low over forest, field and rill,
What would'st thou say?"

Thoreau's journals contain a rich mine of facts, some portions yet unworked; they abound in delicate surmises, that have become established facts since his day, on a variety of themes. He was not alone botanist, nor yet ornithologist; he was conversant, as well, with many phenomena of zoology, woodcraft, piscatorial and nautical details. While

essentially the poet-naturalist of Concord, he has revealed in lesser degree the flora and fauna, the landscapes and the soils in the wilds of Maine, the mountains of New Hampshire, the rivers of Canada, and the beaches of Staten Island and Cape Cod. He studied the plants and grasses of Concord, and, in comparison, he tested and described the red osier, the hobble-bush, cornel and viburnum of the Maine forests and made a careful study of the tree-rings, fungi, sedges, and the peculiar varieties of the gnats and cicindelas. As noted, his later excursions were for the purpose of botanizing. When he went to the White Mountains for the last time, he searched for forty-six varieties of plant and flower and secured forty-two rare specimens.

The detailed announcement of the arrival, songs and nesting-habits of the New England birds, the close study of the ants, tortoise, muskrats and mussels as laborers and housekeepers, the graphic scrutiny of the flying squirrel and winged cat, the minute description of the first quivers of the soil in spring and the unfolding of willows, birches, cowslips and lobelias,—such vivid memories from his pages attest his service as a wide and accurate naturalist. As sympathetic observer, not as angler, he has familiarized us with the traits of the horned pouts, pickerel, breams, "with their sculling mo-

tion," the friends that he would often stroke with his hand from the side of his boat. Familiar though they may be in part, possibly written for an imaginary naturalist before the friendship with Thoreau, yet no words are so strong, in sympathetic description of Thoreau, as Emerson's passage in "Woodnotes," beginning:—

"And such I knew a forest seer,
A minstrel of the natural year,
Foreteller of the vernal ides,
Wise harbinger of spheres and tides,
A true lover who knew by heart
Each joy the mountain dales impart;
It seemed that nature could not raise
A plant in any secret place,
In quaking bog, on snowy hill,
Beneath the grass that shades the rill,
Under the snow, between the rocks,
In damp fields known to bird and fox,
But he would come in the very hour
It opened in its virgin bower,
As if a sunbeam showed the place,
And tell its long descended race.
It seemed as if the breezes brought him
It seemed as if the sparrows taught him
As if by secret sight he knew
Where, in far fields the orchis grew.
Many haps fall in the field
Seldom seen by wishful eyes;
But all her shows did nature yield,
To please and win this pilgrim wise.
He saw the partridge drum in the woods;
He heard the woodcock's evening hymn;
He found the tawny thrushes' broods;
And the shy hawk did wait for him;

> What others did at distance hear,
> And guessed within the thicket's gloom,
> Was shown to this philosopher,
> And at his bidding seemed to come."

It is interesting to note how fully his townsmen appreciate his calendar of the seasons and his "police patrol" over Concord woods and meadows. In some local newspapers, dated years after Thoreau's death, I found several references to his data for that particular week or month, the appearance of flower or changing tint of sky. The brief notice,—"Thoreau says, 'About this time expect,'" etc., recalls the mysterious predictions of the old-time almanacs. This latter-day almanac-compiler, however, was definite and unfailing. Mr. Moncure Conway has exampled the surety of nature-prophecy from Thoreau's words. When the latter told Mr. Conway that the hibiscus "would open about Monday and not stay long," the visitor to Concord scarcely accepted the information as literal so he delayed until Tuesday afternoon before making his search; he found that he was "a day too late,—the petals lay on the ground."

The correspondence between Thoreau at Walden and Mr. Cabot, the secretary of Agassiz, is included in the "Familiar Letters" and shows the grateful and respectful attitude of these Boston scientists

towards Thoreau. The latter, with the responsiveness of a true scholar, exchanged his specimens of fishes,—pouts, minnow, dace,—for certain detailed questions which he calls with apology,—"impertinent and unscientific," regarding the color, shape, etc., of other fish. He showed wide familiarity with authorities on piscatorial matters. Mr. Cabot emphasized the delight which Agassiz took in the fresh, varied specimens sent by Thoreau. Agassiz visited Concord later and enjoyed long talks with Thoreau, for whom he always had deep regard. The residence of this great scientist in Boston had a marked effect upon education in America. The awakening of interest in sciences at Harvard was fully appreciated by Thoreau who wrote to Emerson in 1847, of the new prospecti of study and rejoiced that the college was at last ready to arouse itself and "overtake the age."

Despite his interest in sciences and his services to prominent analysts, Thoreau was never fully in accord with their methods. In his journal for March 5, 1853, he acknowledges a circular from the Society for the Advancement of Science, inquiring as to his special branch. With over-sensitiveness he says that he is unwilling to "be made their laughing-stock," nor will he consent to any restricted classification. He adds,—"The fact is I am a

mystic, a Transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot." To complete his self-index, he should have affixed poet, for his focus of criticism upon science is ever that of a poet. He disputes the exclusive attitude of scientists, who restrict their studies to the actual object, and so neglect its subjective effects. He cares not whether the vision of a rainbow is "a waking thought or a dream remembered, whether it is seen in the light or the dark."

As poet, he has great respect for the results of science, while he objects to their anatomic methods. He has compared the poet to an artist with color, the scientist to a sketcher with pencil. Again he urges that the naturalist, in describing an animal, should study its *anima*, its spirit, the living creature. His advocacy and example in this regard have found a worthy exponent in the popular naturalist of today, Ernest Seton-Thompson. Declaring that no person can see, at the same time, as poet and scientist, Thoreau avers,—"The poet's second love may be science (not his first) when use has worn off the bloom." His nomenclature of science was general and broad for that time; his reading included nearly all the best authorities, but he was especially familiar with the earlier nature-students,—Aristotle, Pliny, Linnæus, Gerard, Tusser and Walton. His

specimens, which included almost all kinds of scientific norms, were carefully preserved and arranged in boxes and bins of his own manufacture. The most valuable of his treasures, including rare lichens, plants, stones and Indian relics, were given at his request, after his death, to the Massachusetts Natural History Society, of which he was an honored member.

Thoreau's special work as a scientist was in functional rather than in biological details. The habitudes and moods, the changes of growth, were carefully noted, and in their records also appeared any subjective effects which might impress him. The ideality of the poet-mystic was added to the sympathetic vision of the naturalist. In rereading an old volume of the *Atlantic Monthly*, in search of Thoreau's essays, one finds, in close proximity to the lectures on "Walking" and "Wild Apples," a long series of papers by Professor Agassiz on "Methods of Studying Natural History." Perhaps no better distinction in the modes and minds of the two classes could be noted. One represented that rare type, the poet and philosopher of nature; the other was the prince of exact, tabulating scientists.

Thoreau is more closely linked with Jefferies than with any other naturalist who preceded or was

coeval with him. Among current writers on nature he is variously regarded and interpreted; yet all acknowledge debts of inspiration, if not of education, gained from this pioneer teacher. Two American naturalists who have recently died, possessed, in marked measure, the poetic observation and the patient habit-study which characterized Thoreau. These were Rowland Robinson and Maurice Thompson. The former rustic writer, student of simple humanity as well as botanist, in his quiet, primeval life and his lofty, tenacious ideals, suggested kinship to Thoreau in temperament, though he lacked the earnest, studious impulses of the Concord naturalist. Maurice Thompson, cut off in his years of promise, as was Thoreau, was a rhapsodic yet a practical nature-student. His poetry surpasses that of Thoreau in structure and cadence but such a poem as "The Blue Heron" is singularly suggestive of Thoreau in spirit and habit of mind. Both men had practical occupations amid the wild and rank of nature's growths, for Mr. Thompson served many years as surveyor and geologist; both became sympathetic comrades with all forms and moods of life which environed them.

Mr. Burroughs and some of his school of nature-authors have emphasized the literary mission and

occasionally lack the unconscious, spontaneous impulse of the pure naturalist. Mr. Burroughs, however, has the sharp eyes and ears of a modern trained observer; his nature is cheery and gregarious, and, with birds and animals, no less than with men, he is an intuitive, kindly comrade. With the literary ease and poetic memory which are his, his volumes form the most popular, perhaps the most suggestive, nature-pictures for reading under the summer trees or by the winter fireplace. All these later writers on nature, and their number is many, including Mr. Gibson, Mr. Torrey, Dr. Abbott, Mr. Mabie, Mrs. Miller, Mrs. Parsons, and many others, are familiar with the general facts and classifications in natural history, many of which have been formulated since Thoreau's day. He lived at the inception of the dawn for scientific nature-study in America. To this, indeed, he gave the most potent influence. The later authors have gained in concentration and penetration; they lack the original surmises and the unique reflections of Thoreau's style. They seldom emphasize, as he did, the subjective effect and the symbolic message. In short, they are more truly naturalists and essayists, less poets and mystics. All however, from Thoreau to Chapman, teach the primal lesson from nature,—the need of simplification and clarification of life be-

fore one may enter with full blessing into her sanctuary.

In Thoreau's writings are a few suggestions regarding the relation of nature to art, as well as to science. This vast, unfailing fount must be the true source of all inspiration for artists, poets, musicians, orators, and moralists. With scorn he mentions the restricted scope of art in his own day and country, an art which "cares little about trees and much about Corinthian columns." As often happened, while he deplored narrowness, he was himself guilty of this trait in his judgment on many of the subjects of past history and current study. In the main, however, he prophesied some of the later tendencies in art, and the "return to nature" for theme and color. The true artist will describe the most familiar objects with a zest and vividness of imagery "as if he saw it for the first time." In illustration of this text, he wrote the glowing vision of changing tints:—"Nature has many scenes to exhibit, and constantly draws a curtain over this part or that. She is constantly repainting the landscape and all surfaces, dressing up some scene for our entertainment. Lately we had a leafy wilderness; now bare twigs begin to prevail, and soon she will surprise us with a mantle of snow. Some green she thinks so good for our eyes that,

like blue, she never banishes it entirely, but has created evergreens."

After the manner of the earlier naturalists, Thoreau apotheosized farming as the true pursuit that was accordant with nature. He sought to elevate it from mere manual task to the plane of poetic living. His letters and journal-comments show his discouraged efforts to make the real and ideal coalesce on this theme. He met, in individual philosophy, the same contradictions and irritations that assailed the farmer-philosophers at Brook Farm and at St. George's Guild. He alludes with regret to the horny hands of the farmer and his proneness to become merely a machine for agricultural tasks, callous to his unexcelled opportunities for nature-culture. He never despairs, however, of raising the farmer into a poet of the highest type. To the Concord farmers, or to the sturdy yeomen of chance acquaintance, Thoreau was ever a friendly and practical adviser. Eager to learn from them, he, in turn, suggested improvements for their gardens, surveyed their lands, and analyzed their soils. The New England homesteads represented to him the true "Arcadian life." It was as a result of his contact with nature, and farm-life over which she presided, that he wrote those cheery, whimsical lines, "The Respectable Folks,"

included in the "Poems of Nature," edited by Mr. Salt and Mr. Sanborn;

"Where dwell they?
They whisper in the oaks,
And they sigh in the hay,
Summer and winter, night and day,
Out on the meadows there dwell they.
They never die,
Nor snivel, nor cry,
Nor ask our pity
With a wet eye.
A sound estate they ever mend,
To every asker readily lend;
To the ocean wealth,
To the meadow health,
To Time his length,
To the rocks strength,
To the stars light,
To the weary night,
To the busy day,
To the idle play;
And so their good cheer never ends,
For all are their debtors and all their friends."

Fifty years ago Thoreau studied nature and became her scribe and interpreter in the days when she was scantily known and meagrely valued. With limitations, which the last half century has emphasized because of the rapid increase of scientific knowledge, with an excess of mysticism and poetic subjectivity, echo of the true New England Transcendentalism, he was the first American naturalist to combine science and liter-

ature, nature facts and poetry, in volumes and unpublished journals that defy competition in devoted life-absorption. Mr. Paul Elmer More has well said,—"Thoreau, the greatest by far of our writers on nature and the creator of a new sentiment in literature, was the creator also of a new manner of writing about nature." However carefully students may follow his methods of research and portrayal, they fail to gain that concentrated and pervasive spirit which was his. He so closely identified himself with the seasons and all their messages that his pages teem with a glow and optimism which no rigor or fog can chill. Recall the cheery challenge to complaint about winter,—"Though winter is represented in the almanac as an old man, facing the wind and sleet, and drawing his cloak about him, we rather think of him as a merry wood-chopper, and warm-blooded youth, as blithe as summer."

If Thoreau stands as the pioneer poet-student of nature, he is also the most fearless, stimulating philosopher and seer of the interrelations between nature and society. He antithesized the complex, sham commercialism, then a mere threat, now an enormous reality, as wholly averse to the true expansion of mind and soul. In nature and a constant devotion to her manifold lessons, he found

the sanative reaction from excess of business and society. She could restore health and contentment because of her strength and steadfastness. His contemporaries regarded such sentiments as eccentric and the visions of a poet. To-day, his doctrines of nature, and her part in retaining the mental and physical poise of a well-rounded life, are the accepted tenets of tired, distraught men and women. They form the basis of purpose, not alone in the plans of recreation and recuperation for wearied adults, but also in the great movement towards nature study which has become a potent factor in the modern school-curriculum.

Thoreau's persistent seclusion often prevented him from understanding the educative influences which combine with the deteriorating tendencies in modern luxurious life. Like the prophets of old, he saw only danger and uttered warnings against the social and commercial allurements which would, in time, fatten the senses, but warp the mind and shrivel the soul. The burden of his plea as naturalist and poet was the renunciation of the superfluous and time-stealing luxuries of a "hothouse existence," the substitution, for these baneful temptations, of a devotion to nature which, in brief time would satisfy all the faculties, would bring comradeship, would ensure health and peace. Finally,

to the listening soul, filled with true love for nature, she would utter her messages of religious truth and contentment. "God did not make this world in jest, no, nor in indifference. Those migratory swallows all bear messages that concern my life." Thoreau experienced the disappointments of friendship, he was often confronted by vexing problems in the affairs of men and nations, wherein he failed to recognize the causes of such tortuous events; from such personal and philosophic queries of doubt and despair, he turned always to nature, to find there with King Arthur, the mingled regret and relief,—

> "I found Him in the shining of the stars,
> I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,
> But in His ways with men I find Him not."

Thoreau's Service and Rank in Literature

CHAPTER IX

THOREAU'S SERVICE AND RANK IN LITERATURE

IN Thoreau's first book, "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," occur two significant sentences,—"Fame itself is but an epitaph; as late, as false, as true. But they only are the true epitaphs which Old Mortality retouches." Like many other words, viewed from the focus of the present, these seem prophetic of Thoreau's own tardy recognition, revivified and strengthened by the pulse of passing Time. It is still impossible to give an ultimate prediction regarding his future rank but his present status is worthy of attention. Opinion is yet divergent on the question of his work, as literature, *per se*. Some critics explain the interest which tenaciously clings to his name by his unique personality. Others, equally insistent, place him high on the century's list of authors, because of his marked originality in theme and form. Some would even outclass Emerson by Thoreau and prophesy that the popularity of the former among his contemporaries is only another indication of his supersedence among later generations by the man, so often called his

imitator who, lacking Emerson's grace of form, surpassed him in expulsive and oracular force. Such comment is entirely unfair to both writers and would seem a bombastic application of Emerson's own doctrine of compensation.

While much that Thoreau wrote was by nature perishable, while doubtless in his own revision much would have been discarded, and the wisdom of its publication may be questioned, there remain many pages of rare value, sufficient to ensure his place among the world's benefactors in literature. In his recent volume of historical criticism, "The Literary History of America," Mr. Barrett Wendell, who always speaks with authority, represents the latest judgment on Thoreau as author. Of him, Mr. Wendell says,—"For whatever the quality of Thoreau's philosophy, the man was in his own way a literary artist of unusual merit."

The new interest in nature-study, among young and old during the last few years, has greatly extended knowledge of Thoreau among general readers. Mr. Burroughs has chosen two excellent adjectives to characterize these writings and their progressive effects upon the average reader. He calls them "the raciest and most antiseptic books in English literature," and adds,—"The first effect of the reading of his books upon many minds, is

irritation and disapproval; the perception of their wisdom and beauty comes later." Nor need critics take such violent exceptions to Mr. Burroughs' index of Thoreau among the world's great writers,—"in the front of the second class of American authors." While his volumes contain ethical, scientific, and poetic material, unsurpassed in uniqueness and volume, as a litterateur he scarcely merits place beside the artists in structure and style,—Irving, Cooper, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Lowell. It is as difficult, however, to give him consistent place among the second class of writers, many of whom are so ephemeral and commonplace. In truth, the personality and the writings alike of Thoreau represented such an extreme, though prescribed, development of natural genius and transcendental culture that they defy classification among compeers. Some latter-day naturalists in essay form may be spoken of as successors of Thoreau but they are in no sense his imitators or even his disciples. Dr. Charles Abbott has well said,—"Thoreau had no predecessor and can have no successor."

In raising the question whether Thoreau's popularity is due to passing enthusiasm for nature, or whether he has attained a lasting place, not alone in native letters but also in the world's literature,

two significant facts must be noted. In the first place, interest in his writings began fifty years ago and has grown steadily, even before the impulse of the last two decades. Literary comets do not thus quietly appear and remain. In the second place, while his books concentre about nature, they treat a second subject of equal import to humanity in all ages,—strong thoughts on the economy, morality, and true use of life.

Seldom has an author met less response from publishers and public during lifetime to win, as if by compensation, such cumulative interest after his death. As a result of twenty-five years of writing, he published only two books. The literary history of those decades, however, reveals almost parallel cases of defeat, or slowly-gained success. It was the critical childhood of American literature and her offspring could not be granted too great freedom or praise until their health had been tested. The survival of the fittest finds oft example in American literature of the last century. Had Bryant, Emerson, or Hawthorne died at Thoreau's age, forty-five, they would have had scarcely more recognition during their lives. Complacent as was Thoreau, this constant failure to win publishers in Boston and New York discouraged, and then disgusted, him. While his chief joy was in the ex-

pression of his thoughts for his own expansion, he had hoped to share these with a small and sympathetic reading-circle. With an undertone of resignation, he wrote ;—

> "Fame cannot tempt the bard
> Who's famous with his God,
> Nor laurel him reward
> Who has his Maker's nod."

On no account would he desecrate his soul by accepting compromises or subsidies, that he might appear in print. His work was his religion. The literary impulse was an early one but he did not live in an age when literature was considered a possible profession. He added his name to the list of pioneers, led by Charles Brockden Brown, Philip Freneau, and others, who, with many discouragements and sturdy patience, established literature among the professions in America. In a letter to his sister Helen, in 1840, he had hinted at this aspiration,—" An honest book's the noblest work of man. It will do the world no good hereafter, if you merely exist, and pass life smoothly or roughly ; but to have thoughts and write them down, that helps greatly." With a view of possible use as literary material, as well as contemporary record of thoughts and life, he began those famous journals which have furnished the nucleus of all his books,

and have enabled the world to receive fresh impetus from his mind, long after his life here was ended.

The keeping of journals was the fashion in these days of few books and many stirring thoughts. Alcott had voluminous records, a small part of which has been published; Hawthorne's journals or note-books, of earlier and later life, suggested not alone many personal experiences, giving the best picture of the inner life of this recluse, but also contained many germs of fancy used in later fiction; Emerson's journals, through the printed portions, reveal the real personality behind the veil of mystic idealism,—they were, as he declares, his "savings banks." The query of Judge Hoar,—"Why should Henry Thoreau's journals be published anyway?"—was not a reproach upon Thoreau but a natural inquiry of the years when *journal-keeping* was a common habit but *journal-publishing* had not yet come into vogue.

In one of the "forensics," written at Harvard in his junior year, Thoreau mentions the desirability of "keeping a private journal or record of thoughts, feelings, studies, and daily experience." In this respect, as in many others, he simply adopted the habit and idea of others, but gave to his personal application an intensity and absorption which made the result unusual and individual. There are jour-

nals and there are diaries. The latter are the common form,—mere chronology of daily experiences. In the last generation they usually began in almanac style with a record of the weather, probably a legacy from "Poor Richard" and his companions. Even these trivial and laconic diaries are superseded to-day by the tyrannous "engagement book." Thoreau's journals, from the inception of the idea, belonged to the loftier literary form, like the soul-records of Saint Augustine, Montaigne, Amiel, or Thomas à Kempis, or the "Table-Talk" of Luther and Coleridge. To him the journal became "a record of experiences and growth, not a preserve of things well done and said." His thoughts and inner experiences, emotions, moods and aspirations, were jotted down that later they might be united into a literary frame-work.

In the same college essay, in which he advocates the maintenance of a journal, he expands this idea somewhat by describing the view from his "little Gothic window," and his reveries on the quiet Sunday afternoon. In a fragmentary way he began the next year, 1835, to record occasional thoughts and observations. According to his own statement, "the big red journal" of 596 pages, was begun in October, 1837, and ended June, 1840. To it succeeded the thirty-five smaller volumes, ripe with

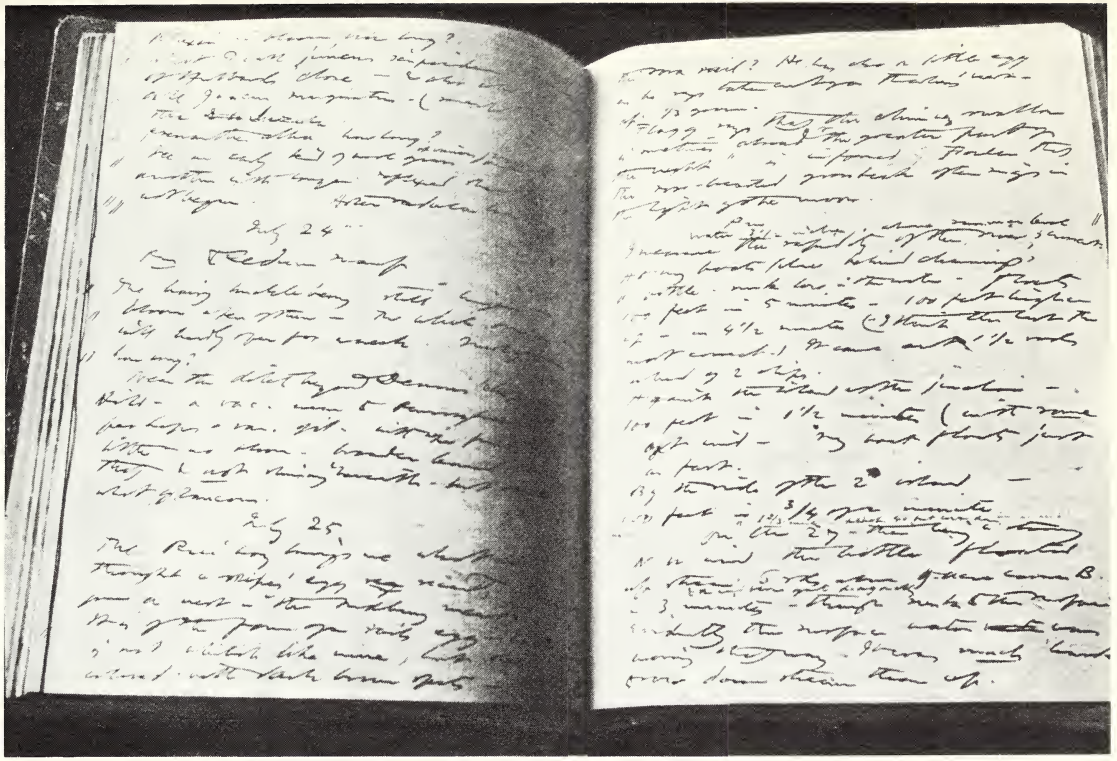
the racy thoughts which the public has already gleaned in part. It has been my privilege to see these treasured little blank-books, varying in size and somewhat in thickness, though seldom aggregating more than one hundred pages. They are arranged to contain the entries of about six months each; many of them are carefully indexed. Until the last year of his life, when the records are meagre, they were written in ink, in that peculiar, uneven handwriting here reproduced. In examining these little books, carefully treasured to-day in their bank-vault, one realizes how laborious must have been the editing by Mr. Blake, carried on with earnest, devoted enthusiasm, which transformed the difficulties into labors of love. The notes are most puzzling to decipher, both because of the irregularity of the letter-form and also on account of many abbreviations. Interspersed are a few pen-illustrations of the different objects described. The portions of pages, which he extracted for his published work before his last sickness, are carefully indicated; the selections used in preparation for further volumes, during the last months of his life, are also marked with marginal notes. In addition to the journals bearing certain dates, are two volumes of extracts from his thoughts and readings. Nearly all the journals

were written in an accountant's ledger of small size. One of Thoreau's direct complaints against the growing commercialism of his age was that he could not buy proper blank-books, in which to record his thoughts and relations with nature, without finding within them the inevitable and mercantile red-lines for dollars and cents.

These journals, as innately regarded, are most remarkable for their mingled sameness and variety; serene sameness of general theme but unending variety of expression and image. Nature, friendship, books, morality, justice,—such are the reiterated subjects. Are they not the universal concepts of a higher range of thought and life? In all the records there is a vital, intense touch, or a unique illustration with potent force, which seem to reveal the man behind the pen, however abstruse and chimerical may be the idea. He wrote,—"My journal should be the record of my love. I would write in it only of the things I love, my affection for an aspect of the world, what I love to think of." It is not strange that, by this mingling of enthusiasm and worthy exclusion, these journal-pages have such perennial vitality. Their dual charm is in the philosophy mingled with nature-pictures and melodies. Such were the manifestations of the author's own duality,—"the sylvan and the human."

In editing the volume, "Summer," Mr. Blake quoted Thoreau's own plan of these journals, to make "a book of the seasons, each page of which should be written in its own season and out-of-doors, or in its own locality, wherever it may be." Acting on this suggestion, the executor sifted and combined the thoughts for each season, a work of exhaustive, loving effort, until now the circle of the year is complete. Alcott well summarized, in his own journal, the value of Thoreau's "masterpieces,—a choice mingling of physical and metaphysical elements. . . . Quick with thought his sentences are colored and consolidated therein by his plastic genius." Perchance, it was to this friend that the thought of publishing these journals, may be first traced;—"A delightful volume might be compiled from Thoreau's journals by selecting what he wrote at a certain date annually, thus giving a calendar of his thoughts on that day from year to year." Such volumes, he adds, would be "instructive alike to naturalist, farmer, woodman and scholar."

While the journals were the granaries from which the larger number of Thoreau's books were to be gathered, his earliest efforts at publication were through the magazines. Dr. Jones, in his valuable bibliography of Thoreau, has collated the few interesting magazine articles published during his



THOREAU'S JOURNAL

Reproduced from a photograph of the actual volume

life or soon after his death. In addition to his contributions to *The Dial*, his only noteworthy essays were the study of Carlyle in *Graham's*, in 1847, a portion of "The Yankee in Canada" in *Putnam's* in 1853, and the article on "The Maine Woods" in the *Atlantic* which caused the strained relations with Lowell, already mentioned. He also contributed to the *Democratic Review*, and some other organs of anti-slavery trend. The year before Thoreau's death, Mr. James T. Fields succeeded to the editorship of the *Atlantic*. He had visited Thoreau at Walden and at Concord, was deeply interested in him as man and writer, and invited him to become a contributor to his magazine. The lectures on "Walking" and "Autumnal Tints," with the study of "Wild Apples," which have been mentioned, appeared a few months before his death, prepared and revised in that cheery sitting-room that refused to accept any suggestion of gloom or idleness. These essays are among the best work which bears Thoreau's name. They are breezy and cogent, fitting sequels to the active, nature-enshrined life of their author.

The papers on slavery themes are included in the volume of his essays. Here also is that fine study of Carlyle, so well conceived and executed that the reader regrets Thoreau's failure to act upon Greeley's

advice to supplement this article with similar studies on Emerson, Alcott, and Hawthorne. The refusal was probably due to two causes which are, perhaps, identical in sequel. In the first place, Thoreau was the last man who would coin money out of his friendships. He would not openly reveal the defects which his keen mind perceived. On the other hand, his sure sense of justice and truth would preclude any concealment of flaws in a critical study. Thus, his idealistic sentiment on friendship and his absolute sincerity combined to prevent any published judgment on his friends. In a different and impersonal way Carlyle had been a formative influence in Thoreau's life. To him, unbound by the ties of friendship, he could give careful and frank analysis. He has most happily mingled tribute and censure. In truth, this essay on Carlyle ranks to-day as one of the most just, sympathetic and comprehensive analyses of the great prophet-author. It is interesting to read, by way of comparison, the study by Lowell. Both Thoreau and Lowell, as young men, had been thrilled by this new voice of the age. Lowell, with characteristic apprehension, analyzes Carlyle's literary qualities,—his humor, his vehemence, his imagery,—while Thoreau is stirred by the moral earnestness and deep sincerity of the man and seer.

Thoreau could deeply sympathize with "this brave looker-on" who "never sacrificed one jot of his honest thought to art or whim, but to utter himself in the most direct and effectual way,—that is the endeavor." These two men, coeval prophets of social degeneracy, had many similitudes of temperament and thought. In the emphasis of individualism, of work, of hero-worship for the undaunted men of the past, in the expulsive comments on modern society, in the paradoxical catholicity and narrow prejudice, they suggest frequent comparison. Thoreau unconsciously dissects his own nature, when he says of Carlyle,—"Not the most free and catholic observer of men and events, for they are likely to find him preoccupied, but unexpectedly free and catholic when they fall within the focus of his lens."

One could scarcely admire Carlyle, as deeply as did Thoreau, without also accepting much of Goethe's teaching. In the portion of "Thursday," in "A Week," is a careful, appreciative study of Goethe's moral and literary significance, one of the first and best American criticisms on the great inspirer of modern literary standards. These early essays of Thoreau, many of them incorporated in part into his first book, evidence more literary insight than his later volumes reveal. As the years

passed, with the Walden residence and its emphasis of his mission as nature-interpreter, the naturalistic tastes seemed to submerge the literary and critical. He also became more concerned with the problems of morality and government, less devoted to literary models. Once again, in later years, he became interested in an author whose genius and crudeness evoked many comments in Thoreau's letters. During a visit to New Jersey in 1856, he called on Walt Whitman. In a letter to Mr. Blake, after the incident, Thoreau wrote,—"He is apparently the greatest democrat the world has ever seen. He is very broad, but, as I have said, not fine." Thoreau was essentially "fine," he was sensitively repelled by any coarseness, in whatever veneer of refinement. This quality combated his desire to appreciate Whitman. Always recognizing the latter's democracy, religious faith, and affinity with nature, Thoreau could not excuse his treatment of sexual love. To him no sentiment was so delicate, so sacred, too holy for bald or open "celebration." He said of Whitman's attitude,—"He does not celebrate love at all. It is as if the beasts spoke." He was, however, too large a man in judgment to allow these disagreeable interpolations to dim his impress of Whitman's real power and stimulus. After he had read with care the

copy of poems given him by their author, he wrote,—"Though rude and sometimes ineffectual, it is a great primitive poem,—an alarum or trumpet-note ringing through the American camp."

Thoreau's volumes, exclusive of the extracts from his journals, edited since his death, are quite distinctive and representative of the versatile traits of the man. The first book, "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," shows the naturalist, in the romantic and poetic phases of his development, and the literary student fresh from the influence of the classics. His philosophic inquiries are in incipient stages. In "Walden" the latter find more experimental treatment and the book was the work of a naturalist-philosopher, even as the earlier volume bore stamp of the naturalist-poet. The three volumes, "Excursions," "The Maine Woods," and "Cape Cod," records largely prepared by the author for the press during his last months, are yet more representative of the naturalist and his zeal for botanical, geological, and ethnological discoveries. The traveler was a scientist, but he was also a poet and a philosopher; he had become a keen student of life as well as nature, and these later volumes contain a gallery of vivid types and individuals.

"A Week," with its varied themes chosen for

each day, from piscatory facts to Indian history, Buddhism, friendship, and poetry, affords an impressionist picture of Thoreau during these years of developing manhood which culminated at Walden. Many of the most pithy thoughts quoted by Mr. Blake, in his volume of epigrams, are traced to this first book. It was essentially a literary promise,—appropriate is the buoyant stanza of greeting,—

> "Ply the oars ! away ! away !
> In each dewdrop of the morning
> Lies the promise of a day."

The quotations, which introduce the several sections, index the young scholar's devotion to all the best poets of the past and to Tennyson, Emerson, and Channing of his own time. One of the most significant reviews of this book was by Lowell in *The Massachusetts Quarterly*, for December, 1849. Regarding the volume as a record of travel, Lowell praised the author as a modern disciple of the leisurely, old-time traveler-poet, who is "both wise man and poet,—the true cosmopolitan and citizen of the beautiful." He appreciated the literary flavor no less than the "fresh smell of the woods." With enthusiastic comments, the critic also refers to the poems, melodious and distinct, which form the interludes to the prose narration. Here are those tender stanzas "To the Maiden in

the East," quoted in an earlier chapter, the poem on the Concord River, the noble panegyric to the mountains, and the more familiar stanzas, "Sic Vita," "To a Swallow" and "Sympathy." Some of these poems had appeared in *The Dial*, but were here given permanent lodgment.

The rare poetic promise of Thoreau's early manhood, versus the suppression of poetic form in later life, will always be a regretful and puzzling theme to his critics. Among other incidental statements is the explanation, given by him during his last weeks, that he was dissuaded from writing and publishing more poetry by Emerson's criticisms. Such assertion, which comes through intermediate sources, seems scarcely adequate to explain his renunciation. Thoreau was too self-reliant to accept any one's verdict on a matter involving self-development. The real cause for the gradual and almost complete transference to prose forms is probably found in the deepening earnestness and serious studies of nature and life to which his mature years were devoted. Doubtless, the criticisms upon his ruggedness of metre and mystical enigmas of thought, many of them quite as applicable to Emerson's own verse, fostered the inclination to abandon metrical form, but his poetic imagery remained to the last. As Carlyle's prose

was marked by bursts of matchless melody, so the pages of Thoreau, in journal or finished essay, abound in passages of rare prose-poetry. Listen again to this poet's swan-song, in "Walking," "So we saunter towards the Holy Land, till one day when the sun shall shine more brightly than ever he has done, shall perchance shine into our minds and hearts, and light up our whole lives with a great awakening light, as warm and serene and golden as on a bank side in autumn."

In his later years of more strenuous thought the poetic fancies became submerged, or, more truly, assimilated. They were never expelled. One of the last acts of his life was the destruction of several poems, written at varied periods,—an irreparable loss to biography and literature. With truth, Emerson said, "Thoreau's best biography is in his poems." Perhaps, he realized the unveiled light which these would cast upon certain repressed experiences of heart and soul, treasured memories to him but too sacred to be paraded before a curious public. If Thoreau's poems are marred by indirectness and excess of philosophic trend, there are occasional stanzas of freedom and beauty. Love of music, whether heard in nature's tones or in the artificial strains of a music-box, was a lifelong trait of Thoreau. It was to him a means of religion, of

soul-exaltation;—"The profane never hear music, the holy ever hear it. It is God's voice, the divine breath audible."

Emerson and other friends often refer to Thoreau's delicate skill upon the flute; from it he would evoke melodies otherwise unknown. There seemed an aptness in Thoreau's love for the flute,—the symbol of classic times and the legends of Pan. Here was a new god of woods and fields. With exquisite sympathy Miss Alcott wove this thought into her elegy of Thoreau, written amid night watches in the hospital of the battle-fields. She refers to the strange incident told by the family, that, after Thoreau's death, a passing breeze over his flute, as it hung upon the wall, brought forth a plaintive note, as if a message from its master;—

"Then from the flute, untouched by hands,
There came a low, harmonious breath;
For such as he there is no death;—
Above man's aims his nature rose.
The wisdom of a just content
Made one small spot a continent,
And turned to poetry life's prose.

"To him no vain regrets belong
Whose soul, that finer instrument,
Gave to the world no poor lament,
But woodnotes ever sweet and strong.
O lonely friend! he still will be
A potent presence though unseen,—
Steadfast, sagacious, and serene;
Seek not for him—he is with thee!"

In this same first volume are found the two sonnets, "Smoke" and "Haze," which were published earlier in *The Dial* in April, 1843. The former, which is placed by Mr. Stedman in his "American Anthology," represents lofty, poised imagination as well as skilful structure. It was considered a prophetic note of a young American sonnetteer. Like much of Thoreau's work in verse and prose, the full cadence of this poem can only be appreciated when read aloud;—

> "Light-winged Smoke! Icarian bird,
> Melting thy pinions in thy upward flight;
> Lark without song, and messenger of dawn,
> Circling above the hamlets as thy nest;
> Or else, departing dream, and shadowy form
> Of midnight vision, gathering up thy skirts;
> By night star-veiling, and by day
> Darkening the light and blotting out the sun;
> Go thou, my incense, upward from this hearth,
> And ask the gods to pardon this clear flame."

It has been stated that Thoreau, at inspired moments, wrote detached stanzas and committed them to his journal in varied contexts and afterwards combined them into complete poems. There is proof of this method in some of his earlier work. A loss of coherency sometimes results when the stanza, in "A Week," is taken from its contiguous prose and refitted into a complete poem. In addition to unrelated metrical stanzas, there are dis-

tinct mind-images, like the sublime tribute to the mountains or the gentle love-poem, already cited.

Thoreau's initial volume cannot be accounted a failure as literature because seven hundred copies of the edition were returned unsold. Like many another book, unappreciated by the public, it won for its author the respectful interest of a few men of poetic and critical minds. Though distinctly immature in parts, it suggested the plenteous harvest of thoughts on nature and life possible to one who had scattered thus widely seeds of poetry and philosophy. Reread to-day with the memories of his later work, the book still seems fertile in descriptions, ideals, poetry, despite much abstruseness and detachment. Among the letters which came to Thoreau in honor of his venture in authorship was one from Froude which, for some reason, probably modesty and reserve, was not shown by Thoreau and is not included in the "Familiar Letters." It is in a collection of "Unpublished Letters of Henry and Sophia Thoreau," edited and privately printed by Dr. Jones in 1899. Thoreau had read Froude's "Nemesis of Faith," perhaps Emerson's copy, and, in expressing his interest in this somewhat anarchical book, he had forwarded to its author a copy of "A Week," recently published. In a letter from Manchester, September 3, 1849, the English critic

expressed strong, effusive admiration for the young Concord author and his book. Among other sentences of laudation are these:—"When I think of what you are,—of what you have done as well as what you have written,—I have the right to tell you that there is no man living upon the earth at present, whose friendship or whose notice I value more than yours. In your book and in one other from your side of the Atlantic,—'Margaret,' I see hope for the coming world. . . . In the meantime, I will but congratulate you on the age in which your work is cast; the world has never seen one more pregnant." That last sentence must have raised a sardonic smile on the face of the young philosopher whose volume had searched so long for a publisher, whose author had spent ten successive weeks in hard manual work to meet the expense of its issue, and whose shoulders were soon to bear the bulk of the edition up the garret-stairs.

Profiting by the censures of vagueness and laxity of form upon this first volume, recognizing the interest, if not the real value, of his experiment at Walden, if narrated with directness and humor, Thoreau constructed a book which happily mingled the personal and the theoretical, earnest teaching and droll anecdote. In its unique form and theme, with spicy humor and delicate nature-lore, it is one

of the most remarkable books of modern literature. The public made a mild response to its appearance in 1856 and two years after more than two thousand copies had been sold or dispersed. Emerson was especially enthusiastic over "Walden." In a letter to a friend, soon after the book was published, he wrote;—"All American kind are delighted with 'Walden' as far as they have dared to say. The little pond sinks in these days as tremulous at its human fame. I do not know if the book has come to you yet, but it is cheerful, sparkling, readable, with all kinds of merits, and rising sometimes to very great heights. We count Henry the undoubted king of all American lions." Thoreau received many letters of tribute and some of questions. To his journal he confides the diverse and puzzled attitudes of the public towards the book. He cites the case of one reader who enjoyed "Walden" but viewed it as a huge satire and insisted that the map of the town, even, must be merely a caricature of the Coast Survey.

The permanent vitality of "Walden" is its sure excuse for being. Its spontaneity and vigor are as pervasive in the reading-world as they were a half-century ago. Mr. George R. Bartlett relates his encounter in the West with a Russian Jew who had read some stray leaves of "Walden" while still in

his native land. He was so inspired by its atmosphere of freedom and hope and its suggestions of economy of life, that he came to America to gain a liberal education. That accomplished, he was determined to translate the book, which had been his inspiration, into the Russian tongue, that the young men might read it and assimilate its hopeful, vital lessons from nature and simple life. In addition to the valuable studies in natural history, for these are what "Walden" primarily affords, besides the practical and sage advice on material life, well illustrated by epigram and personal anecdote, there are some clever life-sketches, cartoons and photographs. With a realism worthy of Balzac, he describes the Collins family, from whom he bought the boards for his lodge;—"At six I passed him and his family on the road. One large bundle held all,—bed, coffee-mill, looking-glass, hens,—all but the cat, she took to the woods and became a wild-cat and, as I learned afterwards, trod in a trap set for woodchucks, and so became a dead cat at last." With similar compound of humor and realism, he introduced the family of shiftless John Field; his wife "with the never-absent mop in one hand and yet no effects of it visible anywhere."

Cape Cod excels in light sketches, semi-humorous, semi-sympathetic. Valuable as a naturalist's

survey of ocean, marsh, and beach, it ranks an easy second to "Walden" in characterizations and entertaining miniatures. Such are the coarse Nauset woman, "who looked as if she had committed infanticide" and "as if it made her head ache to live"; the postmistress, "said to be the best on the road, but we suspected that the letters must be subjected to very close scrutiny there"; the Wellfleet Oysterman, aged eighty-eight, under "petticoat government"; and the lighthouse keeper who read the newspaper by the light of fifteen Argand lamps, while Thoreau suggests that the Bible alone should be read beneath such grand, far-reaching glow. There is pure drollery in his description of the stage-coach and its crowded interior,—a vivid glimpse into earlier travel-customs:—"This coach was an exceedingly narrow one but as there was a slight spherical excess over two on a seat, the driver waited till nine passengers had got in, without taking the measure of any of them, and then shut the door after two or three ineffectual slams, as if the fault were all in the hinges or the latch,—while we timed our inspirations and expirations so as to assist him."

Such characterizations show the peculiar wit and humor that Thoreau possessed. He was master of both keen sarcasm and pungent humor. As the

years passed, the wit became more pronounced, justifying Mr. Burroughs' pithy comment that his humor "had worked a little, a vinous fermentation had taken place more or less in it." In the volumes which he prepared for publication are touches of anecdote or witty illustration which distinguish them from the compilations made from his journals by other hands. Often Thoreau added these lightsome elements at the last, for they are missing in the original context. In the same way he arranged his material in sections, with breaks and sub-titles, thereby adding both variety and compactness. Such subtle modes example the literary artist who knows how to charm the general reader as well as to ensnare the thoughtful few. With all gratitude to the faithful editor of the later volumes, it is justice to Thoreau to remember that, had he lived, doubtless, their form would have been less monotonous and more finished, as were the books revised by his own hand.

"The Yankee in Canada" has a merry tone and the fun is largely at his own expense. At the outset, he declares;—"I fear that I have not got much to say about Canada, not having seen much,—what I got by going to Canada was a cold." Again, he recounts the droll efforts to talk with their Canadian host, deciding at last that "a less crime would

be committed on the whole if we spoke French with him, and in no respect aided or abetted his attempts to speak English." Like all true humorists, especially of the last generation, Thoreau delighted in puns. Some of them were cogent, others weak. He wrote,—"I am monarch of all I survey"; and again, "I love to lie and re-ly on the earth." After his disappointing visit to a town on the Cape, he wrote,—"Ours was but half a Sandwich at most and that must have fallen on the buttered side sometime." Such bits of humor, like his poems, lose much flavor when divorced from the context,—they are wholly illustrative. Lowell, who in his later essay, denied humor to Thoreau, in the earlier review instanced "the passages of a genial humor interspersed at fit intervals."

On many of Thoreau's pages, where actual wit and humor are lacking, there exists a spiciness, an aroma, like that of his own Walden pines. He combined witty insight with somewhat of perversity and much exaggeration. The result was a trenchant piquancy. His confession was "I wish to make an extreme statement that so I may make an emphatic one." Again, in a letter to Mr. Blake, he writes,—"I trust that you realize what an exaggerator I am,—that I lay myself out to exaggerate whenever I have an opportunity,—pile Pelion

on Ossa, to reach heaven so." This was another trait which he shared with Carlyle. One must appreciate this underlying element in many of Thoreau's statements, or he will miss not alone the pithiness but often the meaning. A good example of extended hyperbole that does not veil the real truth, for this is always patent to a reader of insight, is the record given by him in 1848, for his class-book, now in the college library :—" Am not married. I don't know whether mine is a profession or a trade, or what not. It is not yet learned, and in every instance has been practised before being studied. The mercantile part of it was begun by myself alone. It is not one but legion. I will give you some of the monster's heads. I am a Schoolmaster, a private Tutor, a Surveyor, a Gardener, a Farmer, a Painter, (I mean a House Painter) a Carpenter, a Mason, a Day-laborer, a Pencil-maker, a Glass-paper-maker, a Writer, and sometimes, a Poetaster. If you will act the part of Iolus, and apply a hot iron to any of these heads, I shall be greatly obliged to you. My present occupation is to answer such orders as may be expected from so general advertisement as the above. That is, if I see fit, which is not always the case, for I have found out a way to live without what is commonly called employment or industry, attractive or otherwise.

Indeed, my steadiest employment, if such it can be called, is to keep myself at the top of my condition, and ready for whatever may turn up in heaven or on the earth. The last two or three years I lived in Concord woods alone, something more than a mile from any neighbor, in a house built entirely by myself.

"P. S.—I beg that the class will not consider me an object of charity, and if any of them are in want of any pecuniary assistance and will make their case known to me, I will engage to give them some advice of more worth than money."

Paradox became a favorite rhetorical aid to achieve these trenchant expressions. "I love mankind but I hate the institutions of the dead unkind." After a rainy day they "managed to keep their thoughts dry and only the clothes were wet." This tendency to exaggeration produced not alone an incisive humor, but also a strange vehemence akin to that of Carlyle and Ruskin. In his plea for John Brown, he arraigns the people with a violent comparison,—"You who pretend to care for Christ crucified, consider what you are about to do to him who offered himself to be the Saviour of four millions of men." With fearless vigor and a wit which had truly become acrid, he attacks the modern lethargic Christian, whose prayers begin with

"Now I lay me down to sleep," and who is always anticipating "his long rest." Such comments, which, of necessity, seem extreme and unpardonable to-day, were called forth by the moral apathy of the times when Thoreau lived and wrote. The formalism and narrowness of the Puritan religion seemed to Thoreau, as it did to many another of his time, almost cruel, surely unjust, in its neglect of free, open-handed service to the poor and oppressed.

The extravagant, philosophic chapter on "Clothes" in "Walden" is suggestive of the satire and the serious remonstrance of Teüfelsdröckh. With forceful prophecy, again, he contrasts true education, which regards nature as fundamental and attains intelligent thought, with a forced instruction in sundry accomplishments, or hothouse branches. In the essay on "Walking" occurs this denunciation, couched in the terse, vigorous sentences of his most expulsive style,—"I would say to the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, sometimes, 'Go to grass. You have eaten hay long enough. The spring has come with its green crop. The very cows are driven to their country pastures before the end of May; though I have heard of one unnatural farmer who kept his cow in the barn and fed her on hay all the year round.' So, frequently,

the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge treats its cattle."

Coexistent with this extravagance of expression in humor or in arraignment, which gives to Thoreau's style its vital magnetism, was an unswerving sincerity of form, no less than of purpose. The exaggeration was always bold and self-confessed, a mark of his ideality and his earnest aim to emphasize the pivot of his thought. At the basis, as the motive-principle in his life, was the deep sincerity without which his character and his writings would be nullified. His motto was,—"The best you can write will be the best you are. The author's character is read from title-page to end. Of this he never corrects the proofs." Well do these words apply to his journals and letters. The earlier volumes, which seemed to show "the perfect Stoic," only revealed a part of his character,—his nonconformity and courage. The later letters and journal-pages show the rounded man, in his gentleness as well as his independence, in his cravings of heart and soul as well as his mental strength and social indifference. This persistent desire to record his inner, true self, to deal with themes that were vital, not far-fetched, led to great precision and care in the formation of his more important sentences. Mr. Wendell has called

this trait in Thoreau "a loving precision of touch."

Allied with humor, force, and sincerity, as literary attributes, was a scholarship at once unique and pervasive, adapted to a vast array of themes. His learning was deep rather than broad, but it was noted for aptness. From boyhood he read with care, always supplied with "fact-books." While classics of all literatures were familiar to him, and modern authors found, in comparison, scanty favor, yet it is a mistake to assume that he was not acquainted with current writers. His references show knowledge of Wordsworth, Tennyson, Landor, Darwin, Dickens, De Quincey, Longfellow and others. He recommends Coventry Patmore's poem, "The Angel in the House," then attracting current attention in England. He found Ruskin, whom he read extensively, "good and encouraging though not without crudeness and bigotry." His rare knowledge of the greater and lesser poets of Rome, Greece and early England, his intimacy with the naturalists and travelers of authority, merited the tribute of George William Curtis,—"he added to knowledge of nature the wisdom of the most ancient times and the best literatures." Many of his thoughts on reading are as pertinent and quotable as those of Emerson,—"Read the best

books first, or you may not have a chance to read them at all." "Books should contain pure discoveries, glimpses of *terra firma*, though by shipwrecked mariners, and not the art of navigation by those who have never been out of sight of land." Like the most potent literary prophets of to-day he urged primal study of the great books of the past, the human, vital world-books. Again, with predictive insight he made a strong plea for the study of all the scriptures, in a broad sense, the ethics and religion of Hebrews, Hindoos, Persians, Chinese; to him these were of as great interest as they are to the modern student of comparative religions.

To his exhaustive literary fund, he added a branch of research that was distinctly American. Interested from a lad in Indian customs, he made careful study of the race on his excursions, both from the standpoint of ethnology and sociology. Through interchange of facts with his famous guide, Joe Polis, in the Maine woods, he gained an insight, free from rhapsodic sentiment. He well distinguished their mental traits from those of the white man;—"The constitution of the Indian mind appears to be the very opposite of the white man's. He is acquainted with a different side of nature. He measures his life by winters, not summers. His

year is not measured by the sun, but consists of a certain number of moons, and his moons are measured not by days but by nights. He has taken hold of the dark side of nature, the white man of the bright side." ("Autumn," p. 148.) Carefully prepared and collated, are twelve volumes of notes by Thoreau upon Indian archeology, legends and customs, waiting the service of his executor to furnish the world with these many rare facts about this indigenous people.

The multiplicity and seeming incoherence of Thoreau's themes have been ground of criticism by some unappreciative readers. Herein resides one of the chief qualities of uniqueness and charm. Nature and life in their varied phases, especially in their homely and simple aspects, formed his subjects for study and reflection. As if in answer to this very point, he wrote,—"It is wise to write on many themes, that so you may find the right and inspiring one." In his volumes are gathered practical economy, morality, philosophy, upon the lower levels of thought, while on the hilltops are the poetic and sympathetic vistas and songs. From a tirade upon the defects of modern newspapers, he turns to a description of the morning mist, with matchless imagery;—"But when its own sun began to rise on this pure world, I found myself a dweller

in the dazzling halls of Aurora, into which poets have had but a partial glance over the eastern hills, drifting amid the saffron-colored clouds, and playing with the rosy fingers of the Dawn, in the very path of the Sun's chariot, and sprinkled with its dewy dust, enjoying the benignant smile, and near at hand the far-darting glances of the god." The economist urges simplification of life in details of food and clothing, but he hearkens, in the same moment, to the bobolink's song,—"It is as if he touched his harp within a vase of liquid melody, and when he lifted it out the notes fell like bubbles from the trembling strings."

The variety of themes, often linked by a closer bond than many casual readers perceive, gives to Thoreau's style a diversity as marked as that of his interests. He is always cogent and forceful, whether describing lumber or bird-notes. His paradoxes and symbolism do not detract from his "nutty sentences." He was sometimes careless as to graceful finish, but he never failed to emphasize the vital thought. He scorned sentences that "contain as much flowerliness and dainty conceits as a milliner's window," yet he was master, on occasion, of exquisite diction and pictorial illustration. He commended the vigor of the Bible, Homer, Pliny, Milton, and Raleigh. At times,

true to these models, his own style is direct and potent, as in description of his first night in the woods or the picture of the moose-hunt. Again, some sentences are as laconic as Carlyle and Emerson;—"Say the thing with which you labor. . . . Be faithful to your genius. Write in the strain which interests you most. Consult not the popular taste." If he had the courage to live his thoughts, he also had the persistency and sincerity to exemplify these literary precepts.

In contrast with such passages of frank directness are occasional paragraphs of involved mysticism, especially in the later volumes unrevised by his own hand. In the main, however, his symbolism and imagery are vigorous, often commanding. Such is the battle-array of the red maples and the yellow birches, included in "Autumn." Among his more familiar metaphors, is one frequently borrowed by later writers, the picture of Cape Cod with her "bared and bended arm, boxing with northeast storms, and ever and anon, heaving up her adversary from the lap of the earth,—ready to thrust forward her other fist, which keeps guard the while upon her breast at Cape Ann."

In justice both to Thoreau and Lowell it may be pertinent to recall a few words from the closing paragraph of that essay in "My Study Windows,"

which contains so many clever half-truths and has, unwittingly, caused much injustice to the memory of Thoreau; after his caustic witticisms, Lowell's sense of critical justice comes to redeem his omissions and he says of Thoreau's writings,—"His better style as a writer is in keeping with the simplicity and purity of his life. . . . He had caught his English at its living source, among the poets and prose-writers of its best days; his literature was extensive and recondite; his quotations are always nuggets of the purest ore; there are sentences of his as perfect as anything in the language, and thoughts as clearly crystallized; his images and metaphors are always fresh from the soil." Sure it is, that few American authors, upon such simple themes often called commonplace or abstract, can equal the romantic and brilliant word-sketches, the detailed yet interesting facts in nature and life, and the eloquent, vital urgence upon themes of deep import, which are so fully exampled in Thoreau's style.

In his writings, as in his life, he must be regarded from two view-points. He lived a secluded life yet he was *en rapport* with the best intellectuality and ideals of his age. His was not the stellar existence so often pictured, nor yet did he urge any to adopt the restricted program of activity, which was his

preference for mental and spiritual growth, but from which he often emerged to mingle in broader affairs. We have seen the man in Maine woods and in Lyceum, in Walden retirement and fronting the crisis of the Abolition movement. While self-improvement was his primal aim, one must not forget its corollary,—"I believe in the infinite joy and satisfaction of helping *myself* and *others* to the extent of my ability." Self-expansion was the preliminary step to true service. He mingled rigid, elementary simplicity of life with a poetry and idealism wholly unsurpassed. So, in his literature, his themes and treatment may seem egotistic and constrained, sometimes trivial; but his aims are lofty, his conclusions are of universal import. Few characters offer more enticements for censure, even for caricature, on the externals of presence and actions. His nature was too complex to be consistent in every iota of progress, but the trend was unswerving and the life-expression was consistent in all large manifestations. His ideals were too high to adapt themselves to the restless conditions of modern life but they suffered neither vacillation nor compromise. With many defects of temperament and lack of amenities and graces of mien, with flaws of prejudice and perversity in mental as well as social nature, Thoreau was yet one of the large

men whose powers of mind and soul should preclude undue emphasis of minor faults.

He lived the present life sincerely and intensely, in the light of the future, a future, to his vision, not one of reward so much as of soul-expansion. "Every part of nature teaches that the passing away of one life is the making room for another." In the final analysis, his life-purpose was fealty to nature; other subjects were correlated, symbolic, or contrasting issues from this great interest. Noting with delight a little hillside stream at Hull, he wrote, in "Cape Cod," the simple yet significant confession,—"If I should go to Rome, perhaps it would be some spring in the Capitoline Hill I should remember the longest." In his diverse, potent nature-interpretation, in his uplifting ideals, towards which he strove with patience and progress, in his literary uniqueness and pictorial magnetism, Thoreau is a solitary figure, yet a pregnant inspiration, in American history and literature.

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